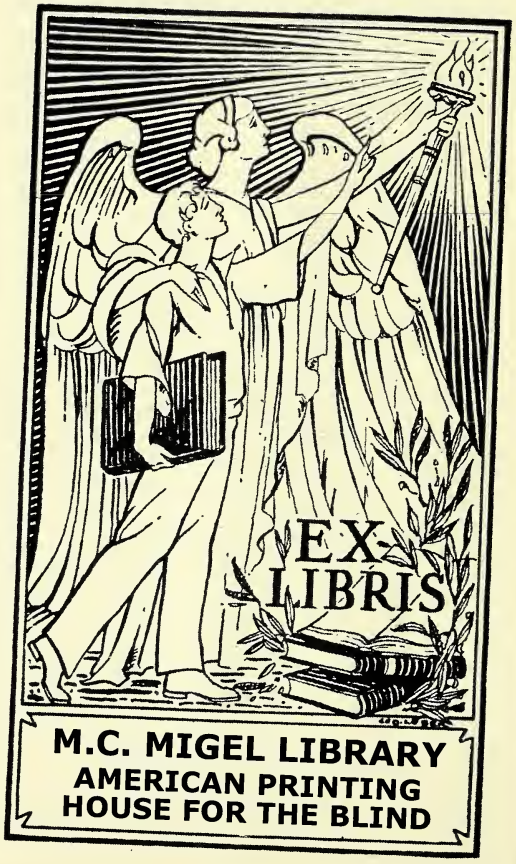

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COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY STUDIES IN ENGLISH
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MILTON'S BLINDNESS

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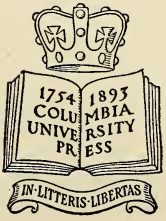
MILTON'S BLINDNESS

BY

ELEANOR GERTRUDE BROWN



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DEDICATED TO

ELLINOR M. BARNEY

Someone once asked Kingsley what was the secret of his strong, joyous life, and he answered, "I had a friend."

PREFACE

This effort to bring together whatever is significant concerning a certain phase of Milton's life would have been a futile task, if not impossible, without the generous assistance of many distinguished members of the medical profession who gave without stint their expressions of seasoned judgment and wise conjecture, or the advice and help of scholars and librarians who were unsparing in their co-operation. To these I am grateful beyond words. And to the wise, scholarly, and painstaking guidance of Professor Frank A. Patterson I owe the accomplishment of the work.

Disregarding the modus of most research, which is rigidly impersonal, I have chosen for some of the material in this book to draw upon my own knowledge and experience. The reader will pardon this difference, I hope, when he learns that, like Milton, I must "cheerfully bid my eyes take holiday." Blindness came upon Milton in adult life, but it has been a part of my life as far back as I can remember. Yet for me, the memory of the red-gold of the sun, the blue of the sky, the green of the grass, and the light of the firefly is still vivid. To the interpretation of Milton's life and writings after the loss of sight, I add my knowledge of blindness. And on account of this bond of union, I bring to the task an interest such as Milton must have given to the writing of *Samson Agonistes*. Thus, by similarity of experience alone, I am rendered a more able critic.

Yet blindness is not wholly responsible for the writing of this book. Throughout its entire preparation, I was aided and encouraged by the late Professor A. H. Thorndike. For me, the only consolation for his passing rests in his knowledge of the fulfillment of the undertaking, which he, in spite of the multiplicity of his duties, ever found time to forward.

DAYTON, OHIO — ELEANOR GERTRUDE BROWN

January 3, 1934

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PART ONE

THE CAUSE OF MILTON'S BLINDNESS

CHAPTER I

MEDICINE AND HYGIENE IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

One of the most baffling and elusive phases of Milton's blindness is the cause: baffling, because it remains and must always remain unsolved; elusive, because the very limited information which has come down to us, when exposed to scientific scrutiny, loses its accuracy and significance. Any study of the cause of Milton's blindness is made more comprehensible by a picture of the century in which he lived.

Practically all of the medical knowledge of ancient times was lost during the Middle Ages. This was due to the wholesale destruction of medical literature in the early part of the Christian era—a destruction which resulted from momentous events such as the sacking of Rome by the Vandals in 455 and the seizure of Alexandria by the followers of Mohammed in 638. The Christian monasteries were doing their utmost to preserve literature relating to the science of medicine. "On the other hand," writes Albert Buck, "the Christian church was doing its best to arrest all further evolution of that branch of science; not consciously, it must be admitted, but through a mistaken sense of its duty to God."[1] Medicine was studied sporadically during the Middle Ages, however, because of the influence of the Arabic Renaissance. In the twelfth century, the university at Salerno, Italy, specialized in medicine; and in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, four of the centers of learning—Bologna, Padua, Montpellier, and Paris—possessed schools for the study of this science. Medicine was also taught at Oxford. With the coming of the Renaissance, these schools served as a cornerstone upon which the structure of modern scientific medicine could be built.

The Renaissance brought a stupendous but gradual scientific awakening, the results of which were felt in England more in the seventeenth than in the sixteenth century. That Sir Francis Bacon, with his *Novum Organum,* gave an impetus to scientific progress in England is without doubt. In his *New Atlantis,* which possesses a peculiar fascination for the average reader, since it is less technical than the *Novum Organum,* Bacon pictured a Utopia so strikingly modern in scientific advancement that we can almost imagine ourselves transported from the seventeenth century to the twentieth. The preparations and instruments for learning the causes and secret motions of things and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire—which were the aims of Salomon's house—indicate the far-seeing mind of the scholarly Bacon. *The New Atlantis* possessed caves

[1] Albert Buck, *The Growth of Medicine,* London, 1917, p. 181.

for the imitation of natural mines and for the production of artificial metals, towers for insolation and astronomy, streams to furnish water power, and winds to produce motion. It furnished also medicinal baths and chambers of health where the air was qualified for the healing of disease. Here, too, horticulture was studied extensively; grafting, inoculation, and the forcing of plants so that they might bear out of season were employed. There were facilities for surgical and medical experiments on animals.

Sir Francis Bacon is one of the three great Englishmen to whom the advance of scientific thought in the seventeenth century is attributed. Sir Isaac Newton and William Harvey complete the list. Newton, who was but ten years old when Milton lost his sight, belongs rather to the latter half of the seventeenth century, which is just beyond the concern of this book. But William Harvey, to whom the world owes the discovery of the single circulation of the blood, comes within the period which we are discussing. The Greek physician Galen, for centuries an authority in the science of medicine, taught that there were two circulations of the blood, the venous and the arterial, the venous carrying the "natural" spirits and the arterial the "vital." For fourteen hundred years Galen's authority remained unchallenged. In the sixteenth century Servetus discovered the single circulation of the blood. This revolutionary discovery he set down in a book, together with his religious views, which were not in accord with those of Calvin. Servetus was burned at the stake in 1553, the science of medicine being thereby retarded for more than fifty years. In 1628, William Harvey, after arduous and patient experiments independent of Servetus, made public his discovery of a single blood circulation. This colossal achievement alone revolutionized medicine and physiology.

Other famous Englishmen of the century who were concerned with science are: Sir Thomas Browne and Thomas Sydenham, both practising physicians; Robert Burton, author of *The Anatomy of Melancholy;* Richard Wiseman, the only surgeon in England who attained some degree of eminence; and Robert Boyle, who is called the Father of Modern Chemistry. Browne, the author of *Religio Medici* and *Pseudoxia Epidemica,* had learned, perhaps from Bacon, "the one golden rule of the new philosophy, that the examination of facts must always precede generalization and theory."[2] This rule he tried to make the basis for the determination of errors. Of Sydenham, Buck says, "In England, during the seventeenth century, there appeared on the scene only one practicing physician of such conspicuous ability and of so marked personal traits as to place his name . . . high upon the roll of honor—Thomas Sydenham."[3] If Buck's statement is true, and there is no reason to doubt it, one can readily under-

[2] Edmund Gosse, *Sir Thomas Browne,* "English Men of Letters," New York, 1905, p. 74.

[3] Albert Buck, *op. cit.,* p. 418.

stand why Milton's blindness was not prevented, and why the nature of his malady was not definitely known. To Sydenham, who wrote a book on *Medical Observations Concerning the History and Cure of Acute Diseases,* we owe the discovery of laudanum. While he was concerning himself with physical causes and cures for disease, other thoughtful men were investigating the causes and cures of melancholia. In Elizabethan and Jacobean times melancholy was conspicuous. It was discussed in 1586 by Timothy Bright in his *Treatise of Melancholy,* which was followed in 1621 by Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy.* Burton's extended treatment, viewed in the light of modern psychiatry, possesses a knowledge of melancholia hardly surpassed today.

From La Wall we learn that "The pharmaceutical and chemical progress of the seventeenth century . . . shows remarkable advances over that of the preceding century."[4] James I gave the apothecaries a charter which permitted them to separate from the grocers, with whom they had been allied for a number of years. In 1674 they established a garden at Chelsea for the raising of medicinal herbs. This garden is still in existence. These apothecaries also founded a manufacturing laboratory; and to their efforts and those of others we owe the discovery of a number of familiar drugs, such as calomel, compound tincture of benzoin, cinchona, Rochelle salt, milk sugar, and potassium sulphate. To the seventeenth century also belongs the origin of patent medicines and the introduction from the new world of a diverse assortment of products, among which was the coca shrub, which yields cocaine.

The seventeenth century was marked by many individual discoveries, most of which had a physiologic significance. These discoveries dealt with circulation, respiration, and the lymphatic and nervous systems, and the organs of sense and generation. Hugh Chamberlin invented the first pattern of the obstetric forceps, though his reputation is somewhat shadowed by the claim which he made of a secret method of prompt delivery. To this century also we owe the introduction of the use of hypodermics and transfusion of alien blood. The microscope, which opened to science the invisible world, was likewise an invention of the time and must have been used in London early in the century. In *Instruments scientifiques et livres anciens* (1929), A. Nachet states that John Wodderborn, a Scottish student of Galileo, writing in 1610 to Sir Henry Wotton, ambassador to Venice, mentioned the use of the compound microscope. It is probable that both Wodderborn and Wotton used this instrument in London. A point of interest is that in later years Sir Henry Wotton became a friend of Milton. Yet the discoveries mentioned above, important though they were, could, by their very nature, have furnished no remedy for Milton's blindness.

In view of the remarkable progress which characterized the seventeenth

[4] Charles La Wall, *Four Thousand Years of Pharmacy,* Philadelphia, 1927, p. 341.

century, it is not surprising that a scientific society should have been organized. In 1645 a charter was granted to Gresham College, which in 1660 by a grant of Charles II became the Royal Society. This organization is still in existence and has listed among its members some of the foremost men of science.

These, then, were the inventions, discoveries, and progressive movements of the seventeenth century. Yet there is another side to the story of the period, presenting a contrast which is, to say the least, surprising and sometimes frightful. It is the conclusion of Garrison that "the effect of the continued battle for freedom of thought was to make it (the seventeenth century) a period of individual scientific endeavor rather than of concerted advancement of science."[5] But over the majority superstition held sway. Even some of the scientists of the century were not an exception. As late as 1665, Pepys, a Fellow of the Royal Society, presented just such a curious mixture of science and superstition. He is pictured by Dr. Broadhurst with a rabbit in one hand and Hook's book on *Microscopy* in the other.

Homeward, on my way buying a hare and taking it home, which arose upon my discourse with Mr. Batten, at Westminister Hall, who shewed me my mistake, that my hare's foot hath not the joint to it, and assured me he never had his collique since he carried it about him, and it is a strange thing how fancy works, for I no sooner handled his foot, but I became very well and so continue.[6]

The scholarly Sir Thomas Browne, despite his reasonableness, was no less a victim of superstition. In *Vulgar Errors* he fell into new fallacy in the very act of exposing fallacy. Gosse comments:

The tales he refutes are often so monstrous that we easily fancy that they must have been those of the unthinking masses; but Browne particularly says that he has not addressed his pen or style "unto the people—whom books do not address and who are in this way incapable of reduction—but unto the knowing and leading part of learning."[7]

Browne accepted the belief that the basilisk could kill an enemy by the poisonous ray shot from its eye. It is known that both Browne and Harvey assisted at the examination of witches.

Boyle, who was, as we have said, the Father of Modern Chemistry, published a book of medicinal experiments of which La Wall says, "It will shock admirers of Boyle to read these recipes and realize how fallible he must have been in matters of pharmacy and medicine, for the book, as a whole, is a hodgepodge of superstition which in these days would excite

[5] Fielding Garrison, *An Introduction to the History of Medicine,* Philadelphia, 1929, p. 280.

[6] Jean Broadhurst, "Peeps with Pepys at Hygiene and Medicine," *Annals of Medical History,* New York, Vol. X (1928), No. 2, p. 165.

[7] Edmund Gosse, *op. cit.,* p. 75.

ridicule."[8] Indicative of the prevalence of superstition in the seventeenth century was the revival of the curious practice of the "sympathetic" treatment of wounds. La Wall describes the remedy as follows: "The wound itself received no treatment except washing in clean, cold water, and bandaging with clean linen; the bandage was not to be removed for some days. The remedy was applied to the weapon which had caused the wound."[9]

Another curious belief was the virtue of the "divine touch," which seems to date at least from Edward the Confessor. It was used for the healing of scrofula, which was called the "king's evil." Throughout the seventeenth century the practice was extensive. Charles I was thought to have excelled all of his predecessors in the divine gift, effecting innumerable cures even by prayer and benediction alone. Charles II touched several thousand persons each year, and in 1682 he is said to have performed the rite for eighty-five hundred people. It is not particularly complimentary to the healing power of the king that, according to the bills of mortality of the period, more people are said to have died from scrofula during his reign than at any previous time. William III seems to have had misgivings as to the efficacy of the practice. He "could only be induced to go through the ceremony once, when he said to the patients: 'God give you better health and more sense!' "[10]

But if superstition ran riot, it could hardly have been as harmful as the hygienic conditions under which the people lived. "Cleanliness was not a close second to godliness in those days. . . . The Reformation, apparently, did not extend that far! Vermin were sources of merriment."[11] There had never been any particular effort on the part of the Christian church by its ecclesiastical ordinances to inculcate hygienic practices; the civic health ordinances were few and when they did exist they were merely to take care of extreme conditions. There were hospitals, but the nurses were untrained. The patients were placed six in a bed. Sometimes a new-born infant lay beside a syphilitic man or a tubercular woman. Doctors were opposed to ventilation, bathing, and other forms of sanitation. It is not surprising therefore that Pepys refers often to the cold which he believed came from too frequent ablutions. He considered buying a wig in order to keep from washing his hair. It is said of James I that "his skin was as soft as taffeta sarsnet because he never washed his hands. . . . He would never change his cloathes until worn out to very ragges."[12] Of the seventeenth century Balfour writes:

It is a grievous picture of what was called "Merrie England"; London in some respects a death trap, the few considerable towns dirty and dis-

[8] Charles La Well, *op. cit.*, p. 317. [9] *Ibid.*, p. 323.
[10] C. J. Thompson, *Mysteries of History*, Philadelphia, 1928, p. 132.
[11] Jean Broadhurst, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
[12] C. J. Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

ease ridden, many of the rural districts fever stricken and pestilential. Yet the people were used to it all and jogged along unaware that matters could be improved, thankful, especially the women, if they escaped the disfiguring effect of smallpox, considering themselves lucky if they did not fall victims to a calenture,[13] and possibly surprised if they succeeded in reaching a ripe old age.[14]

In materia medica, all doctors, except for a few original thinkers, studied the writings of Galen, Hippocrates, and others, and made the cases conform to the headings in the treatises of these ancient authorities. In the seventeenth century there may be said to have been three medical groups: the philologists, the iatrochemists, and the iatrophysicists. The philologists, instead of studying disease, spent their effort upon the interpretation of the words used by Galen, Hippocrates, and some of the Arabian authors. "The iatrochemists prescribed without stint all the most active substances belonging to the mineral kingdom and all the new remedies which the chemists had evolved from their furnaces."[15] The iatrophysicists aimed solely to remove all bodily conditions that appeared to act as mechanical hindrances to health. Medical terminology had not yet been evolved. The apothecary was consulted in preference to the doctor. He not only supplied the drugs, but also gave advice as to what drugs should be used. Surgery was performed by barbers while doctors looked on. "Without anaesthetics and disinfectants the surgery of the 1660's was little more than butchery."[16] "Blood letting was applied in any and all emergencies: to help Pepys' eyes, . . . to cure the Duke of York of small-pox, and as a general precautionary measure."[17]

Some of the medicines prescribed in the seventeenth century are both incredible and horrible. Mayerne, physician to James I, concocted an ointment for hypochondria consisting of "bats, adders, new born dogs, earthworms, hogs' grease, stagbone marrow, and the thigh bone of an ox."[18] He frequently prescribed for gout the filings of the skull of a person who had not been buried. One can not refrain from wondering whether Milton, when suffering from gout, was given the repugnant nostrum.

In the edition of 1650 of the *London Pharmacopligia* appears that drug that was frequently mentioned as one of the horrible examples of the older materia medica—Usnea. Usnea was particularly an English drug. . . . It consisted of the moss from the skull of a man who had died a violent death. It was obtainable in England because those were the days when the bodies of criminals were suspended in chains at cross roads and in public places

[13] A tropical fever attributed to heat.

[14] Andrew Balfour and H. H. Scott, *Health Problems of the Empire, Past, Present, and Future,* New York, 1924, p. 4.

[15] Albert Buck, *op. cit.,* p. 419.

[16] Jean Broadhurst, *op. cit.,* p. 17.

[17] *Ibid.,* p. 14.

[18] Charles La Wall, *op. cit.,* p. 266.

as a warning and deterrent to other criminals. This exposure was conducive to the growth of moss on the skull.[19]

The formula for "Goddard's Drops," the first medicine actually to be patented in England, was purchased by Charles II for twenty-five thousand dollars. The elements of the prescription were the salts distilled from human bones. Salmon, in recommending it for gout, suggested that the bone of a left leg be used for distillation if the malady was in the patient's left leg, and so on for other parts of the body.

An illuminating example of the medical practices of the times is found in the treatment given Charles II just before his death.

These writings are extant in the writings of a Dr. Scarburgh, one of the twelve or fourteen physicians called in to treat the king. At eight o'clock on Monday morning of February 2, 1685, King Charles was being shaved in his bedroom. With a sudden cry he fell backward and had a violent convulsion. He became unconscious, rallied once or twice, and after a few days died. Seventeenth century autopsy records are far from complete, but one could hazard a guess that the king suffered with an embolism—that is, a floating blood clot which had plugged up an artery and deprived some portion of his brain of blood—or else his kidneys were diseased. As the first step in treatment the king was bled to the extent of a pint from a vein in his right arm. Next his shoulder was cut into and the incised area "cupped" to suck out an additional eight ounces of blood. After this homicidal onslaught the drugging began. An emetic and purgative were administered, and soon after a second purgative. This was followed by an enema containing antimony, sacred bitters, rock salt, mallow leaves, violets, beet root, camomile flowers, fennel seed, linseed, cinnamon, cardamon seed, saphron, cochineal, and aloes. The enema was repeated in two hours and a purgative given. The king's head was shaved and a blister raised on his scalp. A sneezing powder of hellebore root was administered, and also a powder of cowslip flowers "to strengthen his brain." The cathartics were repeated at frequent intervals and interspersed with a soothing drink composed of barley water, licorice and sweet almond. Likewise white wine, absinthe, and anise were given, as also were extracts of thistle leaves, mint, rue, and angelica. For external treatment a plaster of Burgundy pitch and pigeon dung was applied to the king's feet. The bleeding and purging continued, and to the medicaments were added melon seeds, manna, slippery elm, black cherry water, an extract of flowers of lime, lily-of-the-valley, peony, lavender, and dissolved pearls. Later came gentian root, nutmeg, quinine, and cloves. The king's condition did not improve, indeed it grew worse, and in the emergency forty drops of extract of human skull were administered to allay convulsions. A rallying dose of Raleigh's antidote was forced down the king's throat; this antidote contained an enormous number of herbs and animal extracts. Finally bezoar stone was given. Then says Scarburgh: "Alas! after an ill-fated night his serene majesty's strength seemed exhausted to such a degree that the whole assembly of physicians

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 273.

lost all hope and became despondent: still so as not to appear to fail in doing their duty in any detail, they brought into play the most active cordial." As a sort of grand summary to this pharmaceutical debauch a mixture of Raleigh's antidote, pearl julep, and ammonia was forced down the throat of the dying king.[20]

In view of superstitions, morbific modes of living, and medical treatment, it is not surprising that Milton went blind, that two of his wives and two of his children died prematurely, that thousands of mothers and children died. "The high rate of infantile mortality," says Garrison, "was due to the low status of public, domestic, and personal hygiene, which was held in less regard than in the Middle Ages,"[21] and also to the fact that "the art of accouchement remained much in the rear of other branches of surgery."[22] In the seventeenth century wars and epidemic diseases produced a mortality rate equal to that of the Middle Ages.[23] Influenza was a common epidemic, recurrent every twenty years. All these conditions were due to the fact that, though the Renaissance brought about a scientific awakening, the results of that awakening were indeed slow in appearing. But since our subject deals directly with the cause of Milton's blindness let us turn to a consideration of the knowledge of ophthalmology in the period.

Until the nineteenth century practically nothing was done to lift the blind from enforced helplessness, idleness, and ignorance. Throughout the ages, from the beginning of time, there was, generally speaking, but one class of the blind, and it was poverty-stricken and compelled to eke out an existence through beggary. There were, to be sure, a few sightless men, in ancient and modern times, who were held in reverence as prophets, as soothsayers, or as minstrels, or because their deeds previous to their loss of sight had given luster to their names. Homer and Tiresias, Isaac, Jacob, Samson, the Talmudist Rabbi Sheshet, and the "father of the cabala" Isaac Sagi Nahor-ben David, Appius Claudius, Dandolo, and Ziska are among the well-known blind characters of history. These and other noted names, however, are but few in comparison with the thousands unknown and unnamed that have wandered helplessly and hopelessly through streets and byways crying for bread. By the ancient Hebrews the hand of the blind was considered insalutary,[24] if we may judge from the story of Lamech told in the Talmud and referred to also in the Jewish Encyclopedia. This may have been due both to the filth and poverty that by necessity was a part of the blind beggar's existence, since he was an outcast of society,

[20] Howard Haggard, *Devils, Drugs, and Doctors,* New York, 1929, p. 334.

[21] Fielding Garrison, *op. cit.,* p. 238.

[22] P. V. Renouard, *Renouard's History of Medicine,* translated by Cornelius G. Comegys, M.D., New York, 1856, p. 462.

[23] Fielding Garrison, *op. cit.,* p. 304.

[24] Richard French, *From Homer to Helen Keller,* New York, 1932, p. 36.

kept quarantined outside the town limits, and to the fact that blindness was considered by the ancients the lowest degradation that could be inflicted upon man. The ancient Hebrews thought that the blind possessed a debased character. The Talmud compared the blind to the dead, and in Leviticus 21:17, 18 the Lord admonished Moses thus: "Speak unto Aaron, saying, Whosoever he be of thy seed in their generations that hath any blemish, let him not approach to offer the bread of his God: for whatsoever man he be that hath a blemish, he shall not approach; a blind man, or a lame. . . ." How deep-seated in the minds of the people was the concept of the debasement of blindness is indicated by the laws of compassion enacted in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. "Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the Lord." (Lev. 19:14.) "Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way." (Deut. 27:18.)

With the coming of Christianity a few of the sightless mendicants were cared for in asylums, but the large majority continued unassisted and unrestricted in their fight for existence. As late as 1550 in Frankfort-on-Main a man was punished with blindness and then sent forth into the streets to beg.[25] Often these unfortunate beings wandered about in groups and became nothing short of pests. The blind of the last century, because of the educational advantages afforded them, cannot fail to be moved when they read that their less fortunate brothers of no more than three hundred years ago communicated with one another by tying loops in a ball of cord. The number of loops and their length determined the letters of the message. It is little wonder, in view of the status of the blind, that small advance in their education was made until the last century. However, the knowledge of the eye and the treatment thereof made more rapid development than one would expect, in view of these conditions.

In order to comprehend the extent of the knowledge of ophthalmology in the seventeenth century a brief summary of its progress in the preceding ages seems advisable. French remarks, "It is certainly no accident that the oldest accounts of eye diseases were found in the land which Hesiod called 'the country of the blind,' namely Egypt."[26] Great advance in ophthalmology by the Greeks was made impossible because of the disdain felt for physicians and because of the association of blindness with magic.

> . . . for instance, the priests of Asclepius [Æsculapius] cured eye diseases through the temple-sleep, or incubation. . . . On awakening healed, the patient would usually, in addition to paying fees, set up a votive tablet. . . . The remedies were often of the most fanciful sort. . . .[27]

In spite of these obstacles, Hippocrates seems to have been acquainted with thirty types of eye troubles; but Hirschberg remarks that the Greeks knew

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 59.
[26] *Ibid.*, p. 31.
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 32.

little but external eye diseases.[28] To the science of ophthalmology the Romans contributed nothing.[29] In the eighth century, the Arabs, basing their research upon the writings of Galen, a Greek physician, 130-200 (?) A.D., investigated the inner diseases of the eye.[30] In the next five hundred years some thirty texts on ophthalmology came from Arabic physicians. In Europe during the Middle Ages the first traces of optical science are found in the eleventh century in cloister schools, though the study of ophthalmology was interfered with by the church. Out of the Arabic impetus grew the schools of Salerno and Montpellier. But despite the progress in ophthalmology among the Arabs and later in Europe, the knowledge of eye diseases among practicing physicians was deplorable. Bistichius, of the fifteenth century, gives for the cure of leucoma[31] in the eyes of beasts a prescription the use of which we hope was confined to animals.

To cure films in the eyes of beasts, grind glass thoroughly and sift it well with a sieve and put in the beast's eyes, and within five days they will be cured. For the same: burn well human excrement and put it in the eyes of beasts which have leucoma, using a tube, and they will be cured.[32]

An anonymous author of the same century tells of an old man who had a tiny cancer in one eye to which a barber applied a caustic powder that corroded the entire eye and part of the nose.[33]

Just as the knowledge of eye diseases was limited in ancient and mediaeval times, so the use of spectacles as aids in eye troubles was unknown to antiquity and to the Arabs.[34] They are thought to have been invented in the thirteenth century either by the Florentine Alessandro di Spina, or by Roger Bacon. For centuries nearsightedness was treated by salves and waters. St. John mentions eyesalve in Revelations 3:18. In the fifteen hundreds the use of spectacles became quite prevalent, lenses for the nearsighted being introduced at that time. In 1629 Charles I granted a charter to the Spectacle Makers' Guild, a fact which bespeaks their increased use. To Kepler we owe the idea of round glasses. He prescribed convex spectacles for farsighted people and concave for nearsighted.

The meager ophthalmological knowledge of ancient and mediaeval times is further demonstrated by the treatment of cataract. The ancients had only very confused ideas on the nature and seat of this disease. Both the Greeks and the Arabs treated the malady by couching—turning down the opaque lens of the eye with a needle. In the sixteenth century Pierre

[28] Julius Hirschberg, *Geschichte der Augenheilkunde,* Leipzig, 1908, Band XIII, p. 363.

[29] *Ibid.,* p. 363. [30] *Ibid.,* p. 363.

[31] A white opacity in the cornea of the eye.

[32] Lynn Thorndike, *Science and Thought in the Fifteenth Century,* New York, 1929, p. 267.

[33] *Ibid.,* p. 97. [34] Julius Hirschberg, *op. cit.,* p. 267.

Franco, a renowned French surgeon, performed some two hundred cataract operations, and he claimed that nine out of every ten were successful. In a book, *Augendienst,* published by Bartisch in 1583, are cuts of a patient tied in a chair ready for an operation and of the modes of procedure in cataract. "This work," says Garrison, "did much to lift ophthalmology above what its author calls the 'couchers and eye-destroyers' of his time."[35] Of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Hirschberg comments: "The learned doctors and surgeons rarely treated people with eye trouble. They refused to perform cataract operations. Quacks and barbers and surgeons performed the operations and there was always a great deal of superstition connected with them."[36] In a book, *One Hundred and Thirteen Diseases of the Eye,* published by Richard Banister in 1622, appears an interesting poem on the correct time for the performing of cataract operations.

Couch cataracts upon
a day so faire,
That neither wind nor
cloudes disturb the ayre.
When Spring with simples
fills the earths rich lap,
Or Autumne makes
the tree put off his cap,
The moon ith full,
or in coniunction sly,
Or tracing Aries,
or in Gemini.[37]

One may assume that Banister was a jovial person, for he found nothing so effective for black cataract as purifying ale. In view of the conditions cited, it is not surprising that not until the close of the seventeenth century did sound ideas on the nature of cataract begin to prevail, and not until the eighteenth century was the method for its extraction actually worked out.

The preceding paragraph suggests that one of the ways to understand the degree of eye knowledge in the seventeenth century is to cite some of the advances which belong to succeeding ages. Not until 1846 was sulphuric ether anaesthesia discovered and not until 1884 did Keller announce the use of cocaine as an ocular anaesthetic. This means that all eye operations up to that time had to be performed without the patient's loss of sensibility or of pain. In 1728 Cheselden published the history of an operation for the making of an artificial pupil which he had successfully performed. Though his method was attempted several times it had to be corrected before it proved successful in the hands of others. Throughout the ages, until von Helmholtz's invention of the ophthalmoscope in 1851, physicians were unable to view the interior of the eye and therefore could

[35] Fielding Garrison, *op. cit.,* p. 202.
[36] Julius Hirschberg, *op. cit.,* p. 316.
[37] *Ibid.,* p. 332.

ascertain with any degree of certainty only those diseases which were visible to the naked eye. Not until 1857 did von Graefe give to the scientific world his newly found operation for the relief of glaucoma.[38] If, as is sometimes maintained, Milton's blindness was due to glaucoma, the seventeenth century could have furnished no adequate treatment for the cure of this disease. Not until Lister began, in 1867, to teach antisepsis and the protection of operative wounds from the invasion of germs was there even a statement as to the importance of antisepsis.

Yet the scientists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries seem to have been well acquainted with the structure of the eye. In Gregor Reisch's *Margarita Philosophica* (1503) appeared a schematic drawing of the eye which has been traced to a pen sketch in a Leipzig codex of the fifteenth century.[39] Vesalius of the sixteenth century and Briggs of the seventeenth century described minutely the parts of the eye. Though the ocular structure was well understood, it was left to Kepler to explain the true function of the crystalline lens and of the retina.

Throughout antiquity and the mediaeval period the crystalline lens had been thought by scientists to be the organ of sight. Johann Kepler, of Württemberg, in his book, *Ad Vitellionem, Paralipomena* (1604), announced that images were painted upon the retina and that the crystalline lens refracted the rays of light and brought them to a focal point. In his book Kepler also showed that the convergence of luminous rays before reaching the retina was the cause of nearsightedness. Christoph Scheiner, a Jesuit priest of the same period, confirmed Kepler's observations, demonstrated the functions of the retina and the crystalline lens, and maintained that the retina, the expansion of the optic nerve, was the essential part in the organ of sight. Hirschberg states, however, that Kepler's views, upon which Scheiner depended, were not recognized for a hundred and fifty years after they had been given to the world.[40] Descartes, in his *Dioptrica,* 1637, concluded that the accommodation of the eye is due to changes in the form of the crystalline lens.

Though the physical theory of vision found birth in the seventeenth century, it should be noted that its existence was due, not to the physicians and surgeons of the period, but to the astronomers and physicists. Hirschberg remarks,

> The practical optical science of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries makes a sad impression upon the historian. For one who is unbiased it is less advanced than that of the Arabians. The learned had no experience and the experienced ones had no scholarship.[41]

[38] A condition of the eye marked by increased tension within.
[39] Fielding Garrison, *op. cit.,* p. 211.
[40] Julius Hirschberg, *op. cit.,* p. 281.
[41] *Ibid.,* p. 316.

Guillemeau, a surgeon, whose book, *One Hundred and Thirteen Eye-Diseases,* was published in 1585, may be regarded as an exception to the general rule. Garrison is of the opinion that Guillemeau's work is "decidedly the best of the Renaissance books on ophthalmology."[42] Richard Banister's treatise, *One Hundred and Thirteen Diseases of the Eye,* is considered by Garrison and Hirschberg merely as a translation of Guillemeau's work. Of it, Hirschberg says, the most important part is his treatment of the swindling quacks.[43] There were, no doubt, a few diagnoses, prescriptions, and operations by surgeons and physicians of some repute. Hirschberg reports that Fabry, in 1627, used a magnet for the purpose of drawing an iron splinter from a patient's eye. Fabry confesses, however, that the use of the magnet was his wife's suggestion.[44] Yet it is the general consensus of opinion that the apothecaries prescribed, that the barbers operated, and that superstition and quackery abounded. Even in the eighteenth century, five decades after Milton's loss of sight, Queen Anne was a victim of quacks.

> Her majesty sure was in a surprise
> Or else was very short sighted,
> When a tinker was sworn to look after her eyes
> And the Mountebank Reed was knighted.[45]

There were published in the seventeenth century two medical dictionaries containing the technical terms of the optical profession. These works went through many editions but neither the originals nor the outstanding later editions were the accomplishments of Englishmen. With the eighteenth century there was a complete transformation of the optical science which up to that time had been authoritative. Yet Hirschberg states that though there were many textbooks published by French, Austrian, German, and Dutch authors, the English did not produce one complete textbook on ophthalmology in the eighteenth century.[46] They must, however, have been familiar with these foreign publications.

While to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries belongs the knowledge of the structure and functioning of the eye, we must look to a later period for the correct development of the diagnosis, treatment, and surgery as it exists today. It is not surprising, therefore, that Milton went blind, or that the information which has come down to us concerning his eye trouble is, to say the least, inadequate. In view of the beliefs in humors and spirits, in view of the prevalence of superstition and quackery, we cannot expect to find any very definite ophthalmological data concerning even the greatest epic poet of modern times.

[42] Fielding Garrison, *op. cit.,* p. 203.
[43] Julius Hirschberg, *op. cit.,* p. 350.
[44] *Ibid.,* p. 357.
[45] Howard Haggard, *op. cit.,* p. 50.
[46] Julius Hirschberg, *op. cit.,* XV, 31.

CHAPTER II

EVIDENCE RELATING TO THE CAUSE OF MILTON'S BLINDNESS

It has been pointed out that the information that has come down to us is not adequate to formulate any final conclusion with reference to the cause of Milton's blindness. This is due in part to the limited medical knowledge of the century, in part to the lack of a fixed terminology, but largely to the fact that the information is capable of various interpretations. The chief source of evidence is to be found in Milton's letter to Philaras. Considering the purpose of the document, one would infer that a full and sincere statement of his condition would be given. I have included the whole of the letter at this point, although certain passages do not bear directly upon the description of his eye trouble.

Letter XV. *To Philaras.* *September* 28, 1654.

As I have cherished from my childhood (if ever mortal did) a reverential fondness for the Grecian name, and for your native Athens in particular, so I have continually persuaded myself, that at some period I should receive from that city a very signal return for my benevolent regard: nor has the ancient genius[1] of your most noble country failed to realize my presage; he has given me in you an Attick brother, and one most tenderly attached to me. Though I was known to you only by my writings, and though your residence was far distant from mine, you first addressed me in the most engaging terms by letter; and afterwards coming unexpectedly to London, and visiting the stranger, who had no eyes to see you, continued your kindness to me under that calamity, which can render me a more eligible friend to no one, and to many, perhaps, may make me an object of disregard.

Since, therefore, you request me not to reject all hope of recovering my sight, as you have an intimate friend at Paris, in Thevenot[2] the physician who excels particularly in relieving ocular complaints, and whom you wish to consult concerning my eyes, after receiving from me such an account as may enable him to understand the source and symptoms of my disorder, I will certainly follow your kind suggestion, that I may not appear to reject assistance thus offered me, perhaps providentially.

It is about ten years, I think, since I perceived my sight to grow weak and dim, finding at the same time my intestines afflicted with flatulence and oppression.

Even in the morning, if I began as usual to read, my eyes immediately suffered pain, and seemed to shrink from reading, but, after some moderate bodily exercise, were refreshed; whenever I looked at a candle I saw a sort of iris[3] around it. Not long afterwards, on the left side of my left

[1] Homer.

[2] I have found no other reference to him.

[3] The iris around a candle is a symptom of a number of eye diseases, but chiefly glaucoma; it is also characteristic of the normal eye under certain conditions.

eye (which began to fail some years before the other), a darkness arose, that hid from me all things on that side—if I chanced to close my right eye, whatever was before me seemed diminished.—In the last three years, as my remaining eye failed by degrees some months before my sight was utterly gone, all things that I could discern, though I moved not myself, appeared to fluctuate, now to the right, now to the left. Obstinate vapours seemed to have settled over my forehead and my temples, overwhelming my eyes with a sort of sleepy heaviness, especially after food, till the evening; so that I frequently recollect the condition of the prophet Phineus in the Argonauticks:

. . . "Him vapours dark
"Envelop'd, and the earth appeared to roll
"Beneath him, sinking in a lifeless trance."

But I should not omit to say, that while I had some little sight remaining, as soon as I went to bed, and reclined on either side, a copious light[4] used to dart from my closed eyes; then, as my sight grew daily less, darker colours seemed to burst forth with vehemence, and a kind of internal noise; but now, as if everything lucid were extinguished, blackness, either absolute or checkered, and interwoven as it were with ash-colour, is accustomed to pour itself on my eyes; yet the darkness perpetually before them, as well during the night as in the day, seems always approaching rather to white[5] than to black, admitting, as the eye rolls, a minute portion of light as through a crevice.

Though from your physician such a portion of hope also may arise, yet, as under an evil that admits no cure, I regulate and tranquillize my mind, often reflecting, that since the days of darkness allotted to each, as the wise man reminds us, are many, hitherto my darkness, by the singular mercy of God, with the aid of study, leisure, and the kind conversation of my friends, is much less oppressive than the deadly darkness to which he alludes. For if, as it is written, man lives not by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, why should not a man acquiesce even in this? not thinking that he can derive light from his eyes alone, but esteeming himself sufficiently enlightened by the conduct or providence of God.

As long therefore, as he looks forward, and provides for me as he does, and leads me backward and forward by the hand, as it were, through my whole life, shall I not cheerfully bid my eyes keep holiday, since such appears to be his pleasure? But whatever may be the event of your kindness, my dear Philaras, with a mind not less resolute and firm than if I were Lynceus[6] himself, I bid you farewell.[7]

[4] "Phosphenes." "They occur in many eye diseases, and even in normal eyes if the lids are closely pressed against the eye with head held low in a dark room." William H. Wilmer, Manuscript Letter.

[5] Some people who are totally blind are conscious of a grayish whiteness rather than complete darkness, as is usually supposed.

[6] A mythical character famed for his powers of sight.

[7] "Letter to Philaras," in *Cowper's Milton,* edited by W. Hayley, London, 1810, pp. 175-82.

The symptoms set down by Milton in the above letter to Philaras are commented upon later.

From the *Second Defence,* I quote a passage which contains a second piece of evidence pertaining to the cause of Milton's blindness, which is also referred to by Edward Philips, his nephew.

My father destined me from a child to the pursuits of literature; and my appetite for knowledge was so voracious, that from twelve years of age, I hardly ever left my studies, or went to bed before midnight. This primarily led to my loss of sight. My eyes were naturally weak, and I was subject to frequent headaches; which however, could not chill the ardour of my curiosity, or retard the progress of my improvement.[8]

There has been a tendency among scholars to attribute Milton's blindness merely to long study, improper light, and extensive poring over manuscripts. While this is a romantic explanation, it is of little value. No doctor uses this hypothesis except in conjunction with a basic cause. Loss of sight can be attributed only to a systemic condition or to casualty. Excessive study under unfavorable circumstances may have aggravated Milton's eye trouble. Commenting on Milton's early study of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, Dr. Park Lewis[9] says:

The eye stress necessary to familiarize oneself with the Greek and Hebrew letters is much greater than that in reading the square Latin forms, and indeed in Milton's time even English was written with Gothic letters rather than in the form of the more easily read Latin ones.

Dr. Lewis, however, does not believe eye strain alone was responsible for Milton's blindness, as will be shown subsequently.

From Anthony Wood, one of Milton's earliest biographers, we glean our third bit of evidence: "His eyes were none of the quickest."[10] It should be remembered that Wood never knew Milton, and was therefore forced to gain his information elsewhere.

A fourth piece of evidence, appearing to contradict the above statement of Wood, is a quotation from the *Second Defence:* "I was wont constantly to exercise myself in the use of the broad sword, as long as it comported with my habits and my years."[11] It would seem that a person whose eyes "were none of the quickest" could not be skilled in the use of the broad sword. Arnold Sorsby, Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, solves the paradox by reminding us that Milton made this statement in defense against attacks on his character. He continues:

. . . to wear a sword and use it was a necessary equipment of a gentleman's character in those days. Besides, a myope[12] of moderate degree, as

[8] *Second Defence of the People of England,* edited by Francis Wrangham, London, 1816, p. 106.

[9] Park Lewis, M.D., Manuscript Letter.

[10] Anthony Wood, *Fasti Oxonienses,* London, 1815, Vol. V, Part 1, p. 486.

[11] *Second Defence,* p. 58.

[12] A nearsighted person.

Milton probably was, might very well be able to use a sword, for sword play after all takes place at fairly close quarters.[13]

In my opinion, it is characteristic of those visually defective or totally blind to attempt to do the things done by those whose sight is unimpaired. This tendency is, of course, tempered by common sense. No blind person would undertake flying an airplane or driving an automobile. But perhaps it is precisely this characteristic which helps them surmount difficulties. This attitude is portrayed realistically in Margaret Prescott Montague's story, "Red Bird He Can See," which is contained in the collection entitled *Closed Doors*.[14] I do not mean to imply that Milton's vision in earlier life was defective. I merely wish to point out that, if it had been defective, he might have employed this type of activity to conceal the fact. In support of this view F. Le Gros Clark says: "Such an effort is not uncommon. It marks the soul's determination to revolt against and overcome the very obstacle it feels most as a handicap."[15]

Some scholars believe that the anonymous "Life of Milton" may have been written by Dr. Paget, Milton's physician. If this assumption is correct, the fifth piece of evidence should possess singular significance. It would come as near the truth as the limited medical knowledge of the century would permit.

While he was thus employed (answering Salmasius and More) his eyesight totally failed him; not through any immediate or sudden judgment[16] as his adversaries insultingly affirmed; but from a weakness which his hard night study in his youth had first occasion'd and which by degrees had for sometime before deprived him of the use of one Eye; and the Issues[17] and Setons,[18] made use of to save or retrieve that, were thought by drawing away the spirits[19] which should have supply'd the Optic Vessels to have hasten'd the loss of the other. He was indeed advised by his Physicians of the danger, in his condition, attending so great intentness as that work required.[20]

[13] Arnold Sorsby, "On the Nature of Milton's Blindness," *The British Journal of Ophthalmology,* July, 1930, p. 353.

[14] Margaret Montague, *Closed Doors,* Boston, 1915, pp. 48-104.

[15] F. Le Gros Clark, "Milton's Blindness," *The New Beacon,* Vol. XV (1931), No. 173, p. 112.

[16] See Chapter 3.

[17] Artificial ulcers to produce secretion and discharge of pus for relief of some affected part.

[18] A few threads, horsehair, or the like, introduced beneath the skin to form an issue.

[19] Certain subtle, highly-refined substances or fluids formerly supposed to permeate the blood and chief organs of the body. (N.E.D.) See an article on the subject: "Milton's Ideas of Science as Shown in 'Paradise Lost,'" by Katherine Morse, *Scientific Monthly,* X, 150-56 (1920).

[20] "The Earliest Life of Milton," edited by Edward S. Parsons, *English Historical Review,* XVII (January, 1902), 106.

Yet the foregoing statement, whether by a physician or by a layman, contains a surprisingly small amount of information. The only new point in the evidence is that the use of Issues and Setons had produced the withdrawal of the spirits which were erroneously believed to supply the optic vessels.

From Philips's "Life of Milton" we select our sixth piece of information, which resembles in part some of the statements made in the *Second Defence:* ". . . whereas it is most certainly known, that his sight, what with his continual study, his being subject to the *headache,* and his *perpetual tampering with physick* to preserve it, has been decaying for about a dozen years before. . . ."[21] The fact that Milton tampered with physick may seem on the surface of little consequence, but when we recall the frightful combinations prescribed in the seventeenth century, we can readily conceive the dire results which might follow. Of 114 experiments—"a rhapsodical mass of nostrums"—in use during Milton's lifetime, J. B. Williams remarks: ". . . if Milton tested them on himself, [they] may very well *have been the determining cause of his final blindness.*"[22]

Items seven and eight deal with Milton's family and might suggest a possible inheritance. "His father read without spectacles at eighty-four."[23] To the average person, this fact is misleading, for he concludes that to read without glasses at such an advanced age indicates excellent vision. At about the age of fifty the normal eye requires glasses, because it grows increasingly farsighted. It is an abnormal condition for a person of eighty-four to be able to read unaided. It does not indicate unusually good vision. On the other hand, it may denote myopia, nearsightedness, due to a form of cataract. This ability to read unaided at an advanced age is often popularly called second sight. If the elder Milton were myopic, the son could have inherited this tendency, more especially as his mother may have been myopic also. According to Aubrey, "his mother had very weak eyes and used spectacles after she was thirty years old."[24] The significance of this eighth item will be discussed in its proper place.

Yet a different explanation of Milton's blindness is found in the interpretation of the ninth piece of evidence. From the anonymous "Life" we learn:

> He died in a fit of the goute, but with so little pain or emotion, that the tide of his expiring was not perceived by those in the room. And though he had been long troubled with that disease, in so much that his knuckles were all callous, yet was he not ever observed to be very impatient.[25]

[21] Edward Philips, "The Life of Milton," in William Godwin, *Lives of Edward and John Philips,* London, 1815, Appendix II, p. 350.

[22] J. B. Williams, "John Milton, Journalist," *Living Age,* LVI (1912), 176.

[23] John Aubrey, "Collections for the Life of Milton," in William Godwin, *Lives of Edward and John Philips,* London, 1815, Appendix I, p. 335.

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] "Earliest Life," p. 109.

Dayton defines gout as follows: "A disorder of nutrition characterized by excess of uric acid in the blood, attacks of acute arthritis, with deposition of sodium urate in and around the joints."[26] Barker states that "high living, especially over-indulgence in meats and other purin-rich foods, may lead to gout, especially in people who follow a sedentary life. . . . true gout may appear in the thin and abstemious."[27] It should be noted that in the seventeenth century no food played as important a part as meat. Pepys "mentioned nearly fifty cuts or types of fish and meats. . . . Several meats were served at a meal, even when Pepys dined alone with his wife."[28]

Dr. Colman Cutler, noted ophthalmologist of long experience and extensive reading, offers a happy solution to the cause of Milton's gout and eye trouble. In a manuscript letter he says,

A cause of gout is streptococcus[29] infection of the joints already susceptible to inflammation by the deposits of lime or urates. This is unquestionably a factor in arthritis with frequent exacerbations[30] and is associated with inflammation of other tissues such as the walls of the arteries. The uveal[31] tract of the eye shares in this tendency which may lead to exudation and detachment[32] with secondary glaucoma.[33]

From this statement of Dr. Cutler it will be observed that the streptococci which are now considered a cause of arthritis may also have produced sufficient inflammation of the uveal tract to bring about detachment of the retina. This is attributing Milton's eye trouble and gout to the same cause. I am quite aware, however, that the two diseases may or may not have had the same origin.

It seems, as Saurat says, that Milton had arthritis.[34] To quote Barker again, "The tendency at present is . . . to use the term arthritis as a general term for inflammation of a joint, no matter what the cause."[35] After having consulted a number of books on the subject, I conclude that gout is one of the forms of arthritis. The distinction is mainly one of terminology, arthritis being the more modern designation.

[26] Hughes Dayton, *Practice of Medicine,* Philadelphia, 1917, IV, 137.

[27] L. F. Barker, *Monographic Medicine,* New York, 1917, IV, 481. Still another comment is "Men of a fair, light-brown, ruddy, and sanguine Complexion, and endowed with the most generous and durable Principles of Life, are most obnoxious to this painful Distemper." Sir Richard Blackmore, *Discourses on the Gout,* London, 1726, p. 27.

[28] Jean Broadhurst, *op. cit.,* pp. 165-72.

[29] Disease-causing germs of chain-like structure.

[30] Increase of irritation.

[31] The posterior colored layer of the iris.

[32] Retinal detachment is the separation of the retina from the choroid, which is the dark coating of the eyeball.

[33] Glaucoma is a condition of the eye marked by increased tension within and resulting in impairment of vision or ultimately in blindness.

[34] Denis Saurat, *Milton: Man and Thinker,* New York, 1925, Appendix A, p. 337.

[35] L. F. Barker, *op. cit.,* p. 96.

The tenth piece of evidence is concerned with the time of Milton's loss of sight. He was born in 1608 and died in 1674. According to Masson,[36] 1652 was the date of total blindness. All evidence certainly points to the validity of this conclusion. Milton was therefore forty-three years of age when he became blind. From his letter to Philaras, written in 1654, it may be concluded that he was thirty-five when it became evident to him that the sight in his left eye was failing. Impairment of vision, however, must have been taking place before he was aware of the loss.

Let us consider next the eleventh piece of evidence as set down by the writer of the anonymous "Life" and by the poet himself. "But his blindness, which proceeded from a gutta serena, added no further blemish to them."[37] Helen Darbishire,[38] of Oxford University, has concluded from similarities in handwriting that the anonymous "Life" was written by John Philips. It would seem, therefore, that he should know the nature of his uncle's eye trouble. Yet Edward Philips did not know. If the evidence is of any value, the statement, if made by Milton's physician, would carry more weight than if made by a layman. But let us consider the nature of the evidence and the value to be attached thereto. Milton seems to have been undecided as to the exact cause of his loss of sight. In his letter to Philaras he makes no mention of any cause ascribed by his physicians. In *Paradise Lost* he says:

> So thick a drop serene hath quencht their orbs,
> Or dim suffusion veil'd.[39]

I wish to remind the reader that medical terms were not fixed in the seventeenth century. "Drop serene" is the translation of *gutta serena,* a term applied to all blindness in which the eye retains a normal appearance. Amaurosis is still another name for *gutta serena.*[40] According to Dr. Park Lewis,

Amaurosis is a vague term used for a form of blindness for which no definite cause could be assigned, or, as Beer, one of the earliest of the scientific oculists, put it, "It is the condition in which the patient sees nothing and the doctor also sees nothing."[41]

In his discussion of amaurosis, Mackenzie remarks, "In Milton, whose case I apprehend to have been one of this sort, the affection of vision went on for ten years before it ended in blindness."[42] It should be remembered

[36] David Masson, *The Life of John Milton,* London, 1859-1894, IV, 427.

[37] "Earliest Life," p. 108.

[38] *The Early Lives of Milton,* edited with introduction and notes by Helen Darbishire, London, 1932, p. 19.

[39] John Milton, *Paradise Lost,* in *The Student's Milton,* edited by Frank Allen Patterson, New York, 1930, Book III, l. 25.

[40] For further information see John Downing, compiler, *Testimonies and Criticisms Relating to the Life and Works of John Milton,* London, 1903, p. 231.

[41] Dr. Park Lewis, *op. cit.*

[42] W. A. Mackenzie, *A Practical Treatise on Diseases of the Eyes,* London, 1854, p. 891.

that in those days there were no instruments for examining the eyes, such as the ophthalmoscope, by means of which a sufficient amount of light can be thrown into the eye to enable one to see clearly its internal structure. In spite of the fact that Milton, in the lines quoted above, suggests two different diseases, Arnold Sorsby says, "Drop serene and dim suffusion are not so much different diagnoses as two names for very much the same thing."[43] Since *gutta serena,* amaurosis, and dim suffusion are similar terms and since all refer merely to a disease whose effects are not visible, it is obvious, therefore, that the only inference we can draw from the eleventh piece of evidence is that Milton's eyes showed no apparent indication of blindness. This, to say the least, could be a condition of a number of diseases.

I have not considered as evidence any invective used against Milton, such as the quotation from Vergil, "A monster horrid, hideous, huge, and blind," which is used in the dedicatory letter of the *Regii Sanguinis Clamor* of 1652. In the seventeenth century the art of insult knew no bounds. Milton may have provoked disparaging criticism by the writing of his *Defence of the English People,* but "a monster horrid, hideous, huge" is obviously inappropriate to him and bars the quotation from being used as evidence. Comparing Milton with the Cyclops of Vergil's *Aeneid* is excellent opprobrium but it flies in the face of facts and has, therefore, no place in our discussion.

This, then, is the evidence that has come down to us. It is this material that I submitted to various ophthalmologists whom I shall presently quote.

[43] Arnold Sorsby, *op. cit.,* p. 340.

CHAPTER III

FANTASTIC VIEWS OF THE CAUSE OF MILTON'S BLINDNESS

Having considered the available evidence bearing on the nature of Milton's eye trouble, let us turn to a presentation of the causes, both fantastic and relevant, which his contemporaries and later commentators have ascribed as responsible for his loss of sight. It is difficult to conceive that beliefs, which to us appear nothing short of ludicrous, were to past generations poignant and vital truths. Two of the alleged causes of Milton's blindness are of this nature.

Chief of these is the belief that Milton's affliction was sent as a judgment from God. It has not been so many years since the idea of divine judgment was strong in the popular mind. Perhaps there are those even today who believe that ills are sent as punishments from God for sin. In the seventeenth century the belief in divine judgment had a momentous influence over even the most advanced minds. John Evelyn, in recording the deaths of four of his children, refers to the afflicting hand of God. Of the death of his daughter Mary he relates, "She received the blessed sacrament; after which, disposing herself to suffer what God should determine to inflict, she bore the remainder of her sickness with extraordinary patience and piety. . . ."[1] After the death of his daughter Elizabeth he writes,

> Thus, in less than six months were we deprived of two children for our unworthiness and causes best known to God, whom I beseech from the bottom of my heart that he will give us grace to make that right use of all these chastisements, that we may become better and entirely submit in all things to his infinite wise disposal.[2]

This belief in punishment by God must have been rather generally held with reference to Milton, if we may judge from the number of sources where it is mentioned either in affirmation or denial. Joseph Jane, a Royalist contemporary, voiced the common opinion in his remark: "This prodigious blindness is a beginning of his punishment."[3] A further indication of the belief in divine judgment is afforded by the correspondence between Roger Williams and Mrs. Sadleir.[4] In the postscript of a letter to Mrs. Sadleir, Williams wrote, "I also humbly wish that you may please to read

[1] John Evelyn, *Diary,* New York, 1906, III, 149.

[2] *Ibid.,* p. 173.

[3] Joseph Jane, *The Image Unbroken* (answer to Milton's *Eikonoklastes*), 1651, p. 28. Copy in Union Theological Seminary, New York City.

[4] The daughter of Edward Coke, Chief Justice under James I, and the aunt of Cyriak Skinner, to whom Milton addressed two of his sonnets.

over impartially Mr. Milton's answer [*Eikonoklastes*] to the king's book."[5] Mrs. Sadleir's lengthy reply includes a paragraph which may be regarded as typical of the interpretation which Milton's enemies placed upon his blindness.

For Milton's book, that you desire I should read, if I be not mistaken, that is he that wrote a book of the lawfulness of divorce; and, if report says true, he had, at that time, two or three wives living. This, perhaps, were good doctrine in New England, but it is most abominable in Old England. For this book that he wrote against the late king that you would have me read, you should have taken notice of God's judgment upon him, who stroke him with blindness, and, as I have heard, he was fain to have the help of one Andrew Marvell, or else he could not have finished that most accused libel. God has began his judgment upon him here—his punishment will be hereafter in hell. But have you seen the answer to it? If you can get it, I assure you it is worth your reading.[6]

The prevalence of the belief that Milton's blindness was a punishment from God is further evinced by the denials that he and his biographers made to the charge. Against the accusations of Milton's enemies Philips affirms:

This second marriage was about two or three years after his being wholly deprived of sight, which was just going, about the time of his answering Salmasius; whereupon his adversaries gladly took occasion of imputing his blindness as a judgment upon him for his answering the king's book, etc., whereas it is most certainly known, that his sight . . . had been decaying for about a dozen years before, and the sight of one for a long time clearly lost.[7]

A similar refutation of Milton's blindness as divine judgment is found in the passage from the anonymous "Life" previously quoted. Milton himself, in the *Second Defence,* realizing that the people thought that his pamphlets on divorce, his religious tracts, and the *Eikonoklastes* had called down the wrath of God upon him, indicated his conduct as follows:

I am not conscious of any recent or remote crime, which by its atrocity can have drawn down this calamity exclusively upon my head. As to what I have at any time written (for, in reference to this, the royalists triumphantly deem my blindness a sort of judgment) I declare, with the same appeal to the Almighty, that I never wrote anything of the kind alluded to, which I did not at the time, and do not now, firmly believe to have been right and true and acceptable to God. . . .[8]

[5] Roger Williams, "Letter to Mrs. Sadleir," *Narragansett Club Publications,* edited by J. R. Bartlett, Providence, 1874, VI, 249.

[6] Anne Sadleir, "Letter to Roger Williams," *Narragansett Club Publications,* edited by J. R. Bartlett, 1874, VI, 251.

[7] Edward Philips, *op. cit.,* p. 375.

[8] *Second Defence,* p. 58.

The following story, while perhaps not an actual occurrence, is typical of both the belief of the times and of Milton's wit and daring. The same story is told by Visiak[9] with reference to Judge Jeffries, who tried Milton at the beginning of the Restoration; by Sotheby[10] with reference to Charles II; and by Symmons, with reference to the Duke of York, afterward James II. Symmons's account runs thus:

James went privately to Milton's house; where, after an introduction which explained to the old republican the rank of his guest, a free conversation ensued between these very dissimilar and discordant characters. In the course, however, of the conversation, the Duke asked Milton whether he did not regard the loss of his eyesight as a judgment inflicted on him for what he had written against the late king. Milton's reply was to this effect: "If your Highness thinks that the calamities which befall us here are indications of the wrath of Heaven, in what manner are we to account for the fate of the king your father? The displeasure of Heaven must upon this supposition have been much greater against him than against me—for I have lost only my eyes, but he lost his head."[11]

A second belief is decidedly more fantastic, and, since I have been able to find no contemporary statement of it, was probably less prevalent. "Of course there were many to cry out 'A judgment' and to dream that it was a drop of the King's blood which had quenched his eyes."[12] Certain it is that some people find satisfaction in conjuring up gruesome and unsanitary explanations of disasters.

Another theory, more recent but none the less ludicrous, is that offered by the German scholar Mutschmann, whose freakish ideas are much more entertaining than convincing. Most of the theory is irrelevant to our present discussion, but it is too amusing to omit. Mutschmann claims that Milton was a degenerate. He also makes the amazing statement that Milton was not a criminal merely because he was a coward! If this be true, what price rectitude?

Mutschmann's idea that Milton was an albino comes, however, within the bounds of this discourse. The Latin word "alburnus" means nearly white or whitish. Aubrey stated that Milton's hair was "auburn" or "abrown." Giving *auburn* the meaning of *alburnus,* Mutschmann concludes that Aubrey meant to indicate that Milton's hair was of a whitish color, such as that characteristic of albinos. According to the *New Oxford Dictionary,* during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries *alburnus* was written *abron* or *abrown,* "which probably originated, or at least encour-

[9] E. H. Visiak, *Milton Agonistes,* London, 1922, p. 25.

[10] Samuel Sotheby, *Ramblings in Elucidation of the Autograph of Milton,* London, 1861, p. 40.

[11] Charles Symmons, "Life of Milton," in *The Prose Works of John Milton,* London, 1896, I, 508.

[12] George Gilfillan, "Life [of Milton]" in *Milton's Poetical Works,* London, 1853, I, 20.

aged, the idea that *auburn* was a kind of brown . . . and so helped to modify the signification of the word." To show the change in meaning of *auburn* in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries from "yellowish white" to "brown," the *New Oxford Dictionary* quotes the following from Masson: " 'He had light brown hair,' continues Aubrey—putting the word 'abrown' ('auburn') in the margin by way of synonym for 'light brown.' "[13] Since the seventeenth century, the meaning of *auburn* has changed from "light brown" to "golden brown" or "ruddy brown." Most scholars have rejected Mutschmann's interpretation of *auburn* or *abrown,* and, according to the *New Oxford Dictionary,* this interpretation is not that of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

There is a diversity of opinion as to the exact color of Milton's eyes; some say they were blue, some gray, others brown. If Mutschmann's theory were true, there could have been no such diversity, for it is the distinguishing characteristic of an albino to have eyes of a pinkish color. Mutschmann describes the characteristics of albinos as follows: "Albinos dislike broad daylight; they see but badly in it. They often hold an arm or hand over their eyes to shade them. They suffer from nystagmus (continual horizontal swaying of the eyes), and a constant twinkling of the eyelids."[14] We inquire of Professor Mutschmann how it would be possible for a person with such obvious peculiarities of countenance to become the "Lady of Christ's"?

In a scientific study these fantastic causes are, of course, impossible. Now let us proceed to an explanation no less preposterous in view of existing conditions, although scientifically possible.

[13] David Masson, *op. cit.,* I, 275.
[14] Heinrich Mutschmann, *The Secret of John Milton,* Dorpat, 1925, p. 20.

CHAPTER IV

CONGENITAL SYPHILIS AS AN IMPROBABLE CAUSE

In 1924 there appeared in the *Journal de Médecine de Bordeaux* an article under the joint authorship of Denis Saurat and Camille Cabannes entitled "Milton devant la médecine," which was a reprint from the 1923 *Revue Anglo-americaine*. M. Cabannes is Professor of Ophthalmology in the Faculty of Medicine in Bordeaux and is also oculist at the Children's Hospital of that city. It might be presumptious of me to argue the question with a medical man, but since Professor Saurat is not of the medical profession I have tipped my arrows for him.

Saurat's idea is, I believe, that Milton was born with syphilis, which he inherited from his mother and which resulted in early life in a weakness of body. During the Horton period, beginning in 1632, the disease became more virulent, if we may judge from Saurat, who seems to infer this in the following:

> Perhaps, we know now why Milton, once he had taken his degrees at the university, remained for six years in his father's house in the country without adopting a profession. Perhaps we know why, in spite of all the ardor of his patriotism and of his Parliamentarian convictions, he did not enter the army but remained at home to educate a few pupils and to battle with his pen during the Civil War.[1]

It is quite possible that Milton stayed at Horton for the sole purpose of study; it is equally possible that he did not enter the army because he preferred to render service in another way. But since Professor Saurat made the above statements in an article in which he tries to prove that Milton was syphilitic, he must have meant to indicate that Milton's seclusion and failure to serve in the army were due to an active syphilitic condition, for only serious ravages of the disease would necessitate retirement. According to Saurat the period during which Milton was contagiously syphilitic extended through 1657, when the deaths of his second wife and child, which Saurat believes were due to congenital syphilis, occurred. If Milton was born a syphilitic, if syphilis drove him into retirement, and if, as Saurat supposes, his second wife and child died as a result of it, Milton must have been contagiously syphilitic over a period of 49 years.

There is every reason to believe that with Milton's abuse of his eyes, the disease, if it were congenital, would have manifested itself in those organs during childhood. Children suffering from congenital syphilis affecting the

[1] Denis Saurat, *op. cit.*, p. 340.

eyes generally have symptoms that are apparent.[2] This however, was not the case with Milton. Diseases, affecting the back of the eye, such as retinitis,[3] which Saurat has chosen as Milton's malady, occur usually in adult life and are the result, not of congenital, but of acquired syphilis. According to Saurat's inferences, the period of syphilitic contagiousness lasted for Milton at least forty-nine years, and grew increasingly disastrous as time went on. In view of the length of the time, how can Professor Saurat be sure that this supposed syphilis was not acquired rather than inherited? I am not eager to support a theory of acquired syphilis, but such a theory would come a little nearer to the conclusions arrived at by dermatologists. In regard to the question of congenital or acquired syphilis with reference to Milton's case, Sorsby remarks:

The nature of Milton's eye trouble does not contain one shred of evidence in favor of such a view. Congenital syphilis as the cause of Milton's blindness is not only a far-fetched theory, but one that flies in the face of all established facts. A rather less painfully laboured case could be made out for acquired syphilis—less painfully laboured but no less obviously impossible.[4]

I have asked myself why Professor Saurat chose the less possible of two evils. Perhaps it is that he prefers one cause to account for all the disasters in the Milton family. Had he selected acquired syphilis as the disease responsible for Milton's blindness, he would have had to forfeit his explanation of Milton's mother's weak eyes. Again, he would had to give up his explanation of the deaths of some of Milton's relatives. Acquired syphilis would, therefore, reduce Saurat's list of mortalities to those of Milton's wives, his children, and their descendants, a curtailment that would weaken his case for syphilis not a little. Yet I do not believe these are the reasons why he decided upon congenital syphilis as the cause of Milton's eye trouble. It is quite apparent from one reading of Saurat's writings on Milton that he is an ardent admirer of the great English poet. Had he chosen to ascribe Milton's blindness to acquired syphilis, he might have feared lest he create in the public mind a disparaging view of Milton which would wound his own scholarly devotion to the poet, for in the mind of the general public has lurked the idea that acquired syphilis and immorality go hand in hand. Yet to the medical profession it has long been known that syphilis may be contracted without immoral conduct. Solomon[5] illustrates

[2] "The disease acquired prior to birth is more likely to be seen in the front tissues of the eye ball than in the optic nerve, although any tissue may be involved." B. F. Royer, "Syphilis and Gonorrhea as Causes of Blindness," *The Journal of Social Hygiene,* Vol. XVII, (March), no. 3, p. 153.

[3] Inflammation of the retina, the membrane of the eye which receives the images of vision and which is connected to the brain by the optic nerve.

[4] Arnold Sorsby, *op. cit.,* p. 349.

[5] H. C. Solomon, *Syphilis of the Innocent,* Washington, 1922, p. 190. (U. S. Interdepartmental Social Hygiene Board.)

this by the following: "Bulkley says that in 1599 in Nuremburg, Germany, according to the records in the town archives, over 70 people were infected by the carelessness of the town cupper."[6]

Let us now follow the proofs that Saurat offers in support of his hypothesis of congenital syphilis. He examines the general health of Milton and his family, believing that he will find sufficient confirmation therein.

"Milton tells us . . . that he was small and thin and subject to digestive troubles."[7] It should be remembered that in the seventeenth century the diet was mainly meats and pastry. "In consequence of this rich diet," Professor Haggard comments, "constipation was very prevalent and purgatives were taken at intervals of about a fortnight."[8] Milton's biographers relate that he was abstemious in his diet, but even if he did refrain from excessive meat eating it is certain that he could not secure the foods which are considered so necessary by modern scientists. Milton describes himself thus: "My stature certainly is not tall; but it rather approaches the middle than the diminutive. . . ."[9] This statement offers no justification for Saurat's terms "small and thin." Furthermore, smallness and thinness are not necessary indications of congenital syphilis.

Milton was, says Saurat, "a victim of arthritis." Since, according to Barker,[10] any inflammation of the joints is called arthritis, it is not safe to conclude that the arthritis or gout from which Milton suffered was due to hereditary syphilis.

"We know that his mother also had weak sight." Following Saurat's implication, we would have to conclude that the weak sight of Milton's mother was the result of syphilis, though we are left totally in the dark as to whether her disease was acquired or inherited. She was the mother of six children, the first a chrisom child, born 1601; the second, Anne; the third, John; the fourth, Sarah; the fifth, Tabitha; the sixth, Christopher, born 1615.[11] Since Saurat has assumed that the three who lived were syphilitic, it seems evident that he meant to infer that the three who died were also infected. That would make the period of Milton's mother's contagiousness cover fifteen years, whereas "syphilis is ordinarily transmitted for two to four years after it is acquired."[12] To quote Sorsby again, "The survival of the second, third, and sixth does not suggest syphilis, and the death of three out of six children is nothing unusual in mediaeval chronicles and certainly poor evidence for the diagnosis of syphilis."[13] It should be further noted that Tabitha was two and a half years old at the time of her death.[14] "Most babies born in the active stages of the disease die within a few weeks after

[6] One who drew blood to the surface of, or from, the body to relieve internal congestion.

[7] Denis Saurat, *op. cit.*, p. 337.

[8] Howard Haggard, *op. cit.*, p. 342.

[9] *Second Defence*, p. 58.

[10] L. F. Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

[11] David Masson, *op. cit.*, I, 39.

[12] H. W. Haggard, *op. cit.*, p. 377.

[13] Arnold Sorsby, *op. cit.*, p. 348.

[14] David Masson, *op. cit.*, I, 39.

birth."[15] Another fact which Saurat failed to state is that Milton's mother lived to be sixty-five,[16] a goodly number of years for one suffering from the ravages of syphilis.

"His first daughter, Anne, born in July, 1646, apparently in good physical condition, soon, we are told, became ill and deformed, although her features remained attractive." There is some question as to the nature of the deformity. Masson seems to think that it was an impediment in her speech.[17] We do know that she married and then died in childbirth, her child dying with her. She was about thirty-two years of age at the time of her death.[18] Since death in childbirth is not an uncommon occurrence even today, it is not surprising for mothers to have died in childbed in the seventeenth century, in view of the lack of medical knowledge, the inadequate obstetrical equipment, and the absence of hygienic methods. The cause of Anne Milton's death could have been syphilis, but might very well have been any disease resulting from the obstetrical deficiencies of the time.

"His son, John, born in March, 1650, died shortly afterwards." Aubrey stated that Milton's son died at two years of age.[19] According to the record made on the flyleaf of the family Bible, the baby was two years and about three months of age at his death. The record, begun in Milton's own hand and completed by an amanuensis, reads as follows:

My son John was born on Sunday March the 16th about half an hower past nine at night 1650.

My daughter Deborah was born the 2d of May being Sunday somwhat before 3 of the clock in the morning 1652.

my wife hir mother dyed about 3 days after. And my son about 6 weeks after his mother. 1652.[20]

Two years and three months is rather a long period of life for an infant who died of syphilis.

"Milton's wife died in July, 1652." It seems rather peculiar that Milton's first wife, Mary Powell, should die in childbed—apparently, by Saurat's reckoning, of syphilis, and yet the syphilitic baby, Deborah, live! For we must conclude that, if Deborah inherited syphilis, she had the germs in her blood at birth.

"He remarried in 1656; in October, 1657, he had a daughter, Katherine, who died in March, 1658, his second wife having died in February of that same year." There might easily be other explanations than syphilis for these deaths. "According to Dr. Thomas Willis there were three epidemics in the autumn of 1657 and spring and autumn of 1658."[21] By the rules govern-

[15] H. W. Haggard, *op. cit.*, p. 255.
[16] David Masson, *op. cit.*, I, 35, 631.
[17] *Ibid.*, IV, 448.
[18] *Ibid.*, VI, 750.
[19] John Aubrey, *op. cit.*, p. 335.
[20] "Milton's Bible," British Museum, Add. MS. 32310.
[21] Charles Creighton, *A History of Epidemics in Britain*, Cambridge, 1891, Part I, p. 569.

ing syphilis arrived at by dermatologists, we are unable to account for the fact that the first, second, and fourth of Milton's children lived, whereas the third and fifth died.[22]

"The first child of his sister, Anne, lived only a short time." The "Fair infant," who, according to Milton's poem,[23] died of a cough, perished in the severe winter of 1625, the year of the plague. Saurat omitted to mention Anne's first husband, who died seven years after their marriage. He forgot also to mention that Anne had two sons, Edward Philips, who lived to the age of sixty-seven,[24] and John Philips, who lived at least to the age of seventy-five;[25] and also two daughters by her second marriage. One of the daughters grew up, married, and had a son.[26]

"His brother Christopher lost three children either at birth or in infancy." Christopher Milton lived to the age of seventy-seven,[27] a surprising age for a syphilitic; yet Professor Saurat includes him in the list of confirmations of his theory. Four children, three girls and a boy, survived him, according to Masson.[28] One of Christopher Milton's daughters died some time after 1742, his son Thomas married and his daughter died 1769.[29] It is not surprising that three of Christopher's children died in infancy. A more striking illustration of infant mortality in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is found among the royalty. It is a matter of history that Queen Anne had eighteen or nineteen children, of whom none was living at her death, and only one reached the age of eleven years. This is all characteristic of the times, for "the infant mortality was huge, the death rate high, the expectation of life exceedingly uncertain."[30]

"His third daughter Deborah had ten children, the greater number of whom died in early infancy, two only surviving their mother." She, however, lived to the age of seventy-six,[31] and her daughter, Elizabeth Foster, died in 1754.[32]

The ten proofs above, relating to the poor health and high mortality of the Milton family, do not contain sufficient evidence to be used as bases for a theory of congenital syphilis. Saurat has, moreover, presented only one side of the matter. There are many facts which are against his hypothesis and which he has omitted. Some of these we have mentioned before. A few more will now be discussed. The elder Milton lived to the age of eighty-four. He evidently was not infected. Milton's third wife,

[22] "According to Kassowitz's law, the more distant the date of the infection, the more attenuated is the virus and the less evil are the effects on the children." Solomon, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

[23] John Milton, "On the Death of a Fair Infant Dying of a Cough."

[24] Masson, *op. cit.*, VI, 767.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 770.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 772.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 762.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 763.

[29] *Ibid.*

[30] Andrew Balfour and H. H. Scott, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

[31] David Masson, *op. cit.*, VI, 751.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 761.

Elizabeth Minshull, whom he married in 1662, lived to be eighty-nine.[33] She must have escaped the deadly germs of Milton's supposed disease. It should be stated, in fairness to Professor Saurat, that the last date he offers for the period of Milton's contagiousness is 1657, which is the date of the birth of his daughter Katherine. Yet it was not the general rule for women to live to such an advanced age.

Defoe speaks of the low-lying stretches about the Thames estuary, where, he tells us, seasoned inhabitants of the district were wont to supply themselves with wives from the uplands. These rarely lasted more than one year, so that it was not uncommon for a man to have from five or six to fourteen or fifteen helpmeets![34]

It is certainly true that of the three branches of the Milton family, the descendants rapidly disappeared. How many families of less famous character disappeared in the same way will never be known.

In the contour of Milton's face Saurat tries to find yet another proof. "The impression produced on a physician by the portraits of Milton with his Olympian brow (frontal prominence very marked) and his long narrow face, is all in favor of the idea of hereditary syphilis."[35] The Olympian brow is sometimes cited as a characteristic of the congenital syphilitic, although it would not be difficult to find examples of persons who were not hereditary syphilitics and who yet possessed Olympian brows. One readily recalls such notable men as Beethoven and Daniel Webster. I have found no statement to the effect that an oval face is a characteristic of hereditary syphilis. The saddle nose and the Hutchinsonian teeth,[36] which are peculiarities, were overlooked by Saurat or else Milton did not possess them.

"There are two categories of hereditary syphilitics," Professor Saurat concludes; "some are degenerates, unintelligent or even idiotic; some others, on the contrary, are endowed with a precocious and supernormal intelligence. Milton evidently belonged to this last category."[37] It would seem, according to Saurat, that there are intellectually two classes of congenital syphilitics: degenerates and geniuses. Into which class does Saurat place all the relatives of the poet?

This, then, is the material that Professor Saurat has offered as a proof of congenital syphilis, after he has eliminated other theories such as albinism, myopia, and detachment of the retina.

On Professor Saurat's method of reasoning, Alfred Noyes comments:

So here comes M. Taine's compatriot, Professor Saurat, with a large volume on Milton, of which the culminating chapter is devoted to showing that Milton's blindness was the result of syphilis:

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 747.
[34] Andrew Balfour and H. H. Scott, *op. cit.*
[35] Denis Saurat, *op. cit.*, p. 338.
[36] Peg-shaped.
[37] Denis Saurat, *op. cit.*, p. 339.

"A little onward lend thy guiding hand
To these dark steps; a little further on!"

The reasoning upon which Professor Saurat builds his new attempt at guidance is that of a man who has been educated entirely on logical fallacies. He asks the opinion of a modern oculist on a man who has been dead for centuries, and he receives it with a confidence which he would certainly not display in his own case unless he had been personally examined. . . . The reasoning is that of an insane asylum.[38]

I have endeavored to show that the ages of those of the Milton family who survived are not suggestive of syphilis. "It is definitely known that syphilitics are prone to die early,"[39] Rosenau states. "Syphilis decreases the length of life about one third."[40] I have likewise attempted to emphasize the fact that the mortality in the Milton family was by no means unusual for the time. Saurat offers as another explanation for the large infant mortality that of hereditary tuberculosis. But he rejects this because he says it takes no account of Milton's gradual loss of sight. Professor Saurat himself has chosen for Milton's malady "retinitis, complicated perhaps by glaucomatous troubles."[41] It is generally known that glaucoma produces a gradual loss of sight, so gradual that even today the disease is often beyond cure before it is discovered. Saurat rejects hereditary tuberculosis on the grounds that Milton's loss of sight was gradual. He seems to overlook the fact that glaucoma may be caused by tuberculosis. "Other sources of glaucoma," says Dr. Jackson, "are the untreated or poorly treated inflammations of the uveal[42] tract. Every inflammation of the uveal tract raises the responsibility of possible blindness, whether it is from syphilis, *tuberculosis,* or from focal infection of some kind."[43]

It is difficult at times to be sure just what Professor Saurat means. After reading his discussion, I am left with the feeling that he thinks that Milton knew he had syphilis. My impression is based on two passages: the one, already quoted, regarding his seclusion at Horton and his failure to enter the army; the other based on the passages from *Samson Agonistes,* of which Saurat says,

he died in the end of gout, after sufferings of which the echo is heard in *Samson Agonistes,* when the chorus complains that the virtuous sons have to bear the consequences and

The punishment of dissolute days,

as the result of ancestral sins.[44]

[38] Alfred Noyes, *The Opalescent Parrott,* London, 1929, p. 60.
[39] M. J. Rosenau, *Preventive Medicine and Hygiene,* New York, 1927, p. 59.
[40] *Ibid.,* p. 63.
[41] Denis Saurat, *op. cit.,* p. 338.
[42] The posterior pigmented layer of the iris.
[43] Edward Jackson, "Ophthalmology," National Society for Prevention of Blindness, *Proceedings of the 1927 Conference,* p. 142.
[44] Denis Saurat, *op. cit.,* p. 337.

It seems absurd to interpret the passage in this manner. Even though syphilis was not seriously regarded in those days, despite the fact that it was used as a term of opprobrium in religious strife, it is not likely that Milton would declare to his enemies that he was suffering for the sins of his ancestors, in view of the fact that so much had been said by these same enemies about a judgment from God. Milton himself used syphilis as a term of reproach in attacking his adversaries.

Let our zealous back-sliders forethink now with themselves how their necks yoked with these tigers of Bacchus, these new fanatics of not the preaching, but the sweating-tub, inspired with nothing holier than the venereal pox. . . .[45]

He would hardly have chided his enemies with having syphilis, if he knew that he himself suffered from it. If, on the other hand, the disease was used as an opprobrium in religious controversy, in view of the many disparaging epithets applied to Milton, it is surprising that syphilis was not among the appellations used in slandering him. If Milton had the disease, there is no proof that he was cognizant of it, or that his enemies suspected it.

"If he had, as I suppose most Frenchmen now believe with M. Saurat, hereditary syphilis," Professor Hanford concludes, "he did not know it."[46] It is impossible to estimate how many Frenchmen are accepting Professor Saurat's theory. Though his article first appeared in 1923, I found no statement supporting the syphilis theory, in German, French, or English, at the Academy of Medicine Library in New York City in 1932. If Milton had the disease to the extent of the loss of his own sight, of the destruction of his two wives and two of his children, how could he fail to know these disasters were caused by congenital syphilis? If he knew it, why did he fail to mention it in the very important letter to Philaras, since in those days it was not considered a disgrace?

To continue with the refutation of Professor Saurat's hypothesis, giving him the benefit of the doubt, we will assume that Milton's mother acquired the disease. That would put Milton in the second generation suffering from syphilis. It would also place Deborah Milton's ten children in the fourth generation. The modern view is that the disease is transmitted only to the second generation. This opinion is held by authorities such as Fournier, H. C. and M. H. Solomon, Haggard, and Stokes. Haggard says pointedly, "Moral conceptions have colored the ideas of syphilitic transmission until many people believe that a 'taint' is passed even to the third generation—which it is not."[47] Solomon writes, "Substantial evidence is lacking to

[45] John Milton, "The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth," *Student's Milton,* edited by F. A. Patterson, New York, 1930, p. 910.

[46] J. H. Hanford, "Creative Personality; the Case of John Milton," *The Johns Hopkins Alumni Magazine,* XV (Oct., 1926-June, 1927), 334-35.

[47] H. W. Haggard, *op. cit.,* p. 225.

prove that syphilis is ever transmitted to the third generation."[48] John H. Stokes, dermatologist at the University of Pennsylvania, and one of the foremost authorities in the United States, says, "Hereditary syphilis apparently is not transmitted to the children as acquired syphilis is. Hereditary syphilis practically is not contagious except during the eruption."[49] These statements, of course, are the general rule. There may be exceptions, and, since Milton was an exception in so many ways, he might have been a nonconformist syphilitically.

In a letter received from Professor Raymond D. Havens of Johns Hopkins University, he says, "I submitted Saurat's book to a group of professors at the University of Rochester Medical School, and they characterized it as 'absurd.' As these doctors were among the ablest of the recent graduates of the Johns Hopkins Medical School, their opinion carries a good deal of weight."[50]

It has previously been noted that only the evidence that has come down to us was submitted to the ophthalmologists whom I consulted. How many of them knew of Professor Saurat's hypothesis I am unable to say. That Dr. William H. Wilmer was familiar with it is evidenced by this quotation: "The following suggestions which have been made by ophthalmologists, I think may be dismissed. (1) Congenital syphilis. (2) Albinism."[51] Since Arnold Sorsby's article "On the Nature of Milton's Blindness" had appeared in the *British Journal of Ophthalmology* in 1930, I knew before writing him what his view of the Saurat hypothesis was. I quote from his letter: "It is of course impossible to come to any final conclusions on the very incomplete evidence we have on the nature of Milton's blindness. The most one can do with any certainty is to exclude a host of improbabilities, amongst which I would include the views that congenital syphilis and albinism were responsible."[52]

To Udo Wile[53] and J. G. Hopkins,[54] dermatologists, I sent in addition to the evidence a complete transcript of Appendix A of Saurat's *Milton: Man and Thinker.*

Udo Wile wrote:

I think it very unlikely that Milton's blindness was due to inherited syphilis . . . . It may very well be that his blindness was due to syphilis, but if this is so it is far more likely that the infection was acquired rather than inherited, as an inherited form of syphilis seldom leaves blindness,

[48] H. C. and M. H. Solomon, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

[49] J. H. Stokes, *The Third Great Plague,* London, 1917, p. 105.

[50] R. D. Havens, Manuscript Letter.

[51] W. H. Wilmer, Manuscript Letter.

[52] Arnold Sorsby, Manuscript Letter.

[53] Udo J. Wile, M.D., Department of Dermatology and Syphilology, University of Michigan.

[54] J. G. Hopkins, M.D., Columbia University, College of Physicians and Surgeons, Department of Dermatology.

whereas the acquired form very commonly does, in association with syphilitic disease of the cord and brain. . . . In general, I should say that the evidence contained in the manuscript is not anything more than suggestive, the blindness may have been due to syphilis, but may just as well have been due to other causes.

J. G. Hopkins wrote:

The attempt to make a medical diagnosis from the available records of historical personages is often intriguing, but the records seldom give data that make anything like an accurate diagnosis possible. . . . In the case of Milton's blindness the symptoms described do not suggest either an optic atrophy or an interstitial keratitis, which are the commonest forms of blindness due to syphilis. It is conceivable though unlikely that they could have been caused by choroiditis or possibly by some other rare manifestation. However, I believe they would to an ophthalmologist strongly suggest glaucoma, which is not a manifestation of syphilis. It is extremely unlikely that any manifestation of congenital syphilis would begin to be apparent at the age of forty. The point of view taken by Dr. Saurat is understandable if one recalls the French school of thought which attributed a vast array of disturbances of unknown causation to the indirect effects of syphilis. The evidence that syphilis has anything to do with most of these conditions is not convincing to most medical men and to me at least would seem little short of fantastic.

I have tried to present Professor Saurat's hypothesis to the best of my ability. I have also attempted to submit evidence contrary to it. I arrive therefore at the conclusion that the theory of congenital syphilis is not supported by fact, because: (1) The symptoms of Milton's disease are not those that generally appear in congenital syphilis. (2) The period of the activity of the disease is too far removed from the time of infection to conform with the usual tendency in congenital syphilis. (3) The symptoms are more those of acquired than of congenital syphilis. (4) With the contagiousness so far removed from the time of infection, it is not possible to prove that the syphilis was inherited rather than acquired. (5) It is more possible that the diet and living conditions of the times were responsible for Milton's general health than that congenital syphilis was. (6) The weak eyes of Milton's mother could have other explanations than syphilis; for example, myopia. (7) The relative position of the births of the children who lived and those who died, both in the family of Milton's father and in his own family, is not suggestive of syphilis. (8) The mortality of the Milton family is not extraordinary for the civilization of that period. (9) The length of life of some of the members of the Milton family does not suggest syphilis. (10) No one cause could ever explain all the disasters in any one family. (11) The death of Milton's wives in childbirth indicates the type of obstetrical treatment of the times rather than syphilis. (12) Milton's oval face is not considered a syphilic characteristic by any authority. (13) Though syphilis was often the subject of

attack in religious strife, it was not used in reference to Milton. (14) There is to my knowledge no literature supporting Saurat's theory. (15) Substantial evidence is lacking to prove that syphilis is ever transmitted to the third generation. (16) The symptoms are admitted by Saurat to be those of detachment of the retina and glaucoma. (17) The opinion of some of the leading ophthalmologists and dermatologists is against congenital syphilis.

CHAPTER V

GLAUCOMA AS A PROBABLE CAUSE

Having presented the obviously fantastic causes and the possible, though "painfully laboured," hypothesis of congenital syphilis, we turn now to two plausible theories, that of glaucoma and that of myopia and detachment of the retina. Before taking up the discussion of these theories, let us review the history of Milton's case as drawn up by Dr. William H. Wilmer, ophthalmologist of Johns Hopkins Hospital.

John Milton died at 65 years and 11 months of age. *Family History:* Father died at 84. Read without glasses all his life. Mother had weak eyes, and used glasses after 30 years of age. One of six children. Only three lived beyond infancy. *Personal History:* High spirited, sensitive disposition. Headaches in youth. Used his eyes immoderately. Suffered from gout spring and fall. Under great strain about the time of beginning of eye trouble, his wife having left him in 1643. Blindness began at that time, or a little before, when he was about 34 years old. At 44 entirely blind. Cause of death "gout struck in," according to account.

Symptoms: (1) Subjective: *Headaches* in youth. Slowly failing vision beginning in the left eye. Great *Discomfort* in using eyes. *Colors* around light.[1] Smoky appearance in front of eyes. *Subjective* sensations of light (Phosphenes) upon closing eyes while in bed. Micropsia (Objects appear reduced in size) left eye. *Loss of vision* in the left side of left eye. (2) Objective: *Externally,* eyes normal. Vision, blind. Visual fields, contracted.

Impression: Blindness from glaucoma simplex (chronic simple glaucoma) for the following reasons: Externally eyes normal, which excludes all acute inflammatory conditions. *Pain,* none except when eyes were strained. Progress, slow (ten years) bilateral, excludes detached retina[2] and all lesions[3] that occur suddenly. *Colored rings* around lights, which is a common symptom of chronic glaucoma. *Phosphenes* not characteristic of glaucoma alone, but they occur in many eye diseases, and even in normal eyes if the lids are closely pressed against the eye with head low in a dark room. *Micropsia* not characteristic of glaucoma, though it could occur. *Smoky* vision very characteristic of glaucoma. Possible contributing cause of disease (1) Temperament, (2) Gout, (3) Excessive use of eyes, (4) Nervous strain connected with wife's leaving, etc. (5) Age compatible with glaucoma.[4]

For a better understanding of the exact nature of glaucoma, it seems advisable to include a general explanation of the disease. Glaucoma may be

[1] Iris.

[2] Retinal detachment is the separation of the retina from the choroid, which is the dark coating of the eyeball.

[3] Any morbid change in exercise of function or in texture of the organ.

[4] W. H. Wilmer, *op. cit.*

briefly defined as increased intraocular tension. In the normal eye the aqueous humor[5] flowing into the eye must equal in amount that flowing out of it or *vice versa.* If, however, the inflow is increased, as by a rise in blood pressure, or the drainage is decreased, as by blocking, the extra amount of liquid retained in the eye causes an undue pressure on different parts of that organ, particularly the optic nerve. Since the pressure increases gradually, the tension put upon all parts is also gradual; so much so that injury to the optic nerve is usually sustained before the patient is actually aware of any eye trouble. This glaucomatous condition passes from one eye to the other and is usually discovered in time to save the sight of the second eye. One of the unfortunate characteristics of the disease is its painlessness in the early stages. Another is the contraction of the visual field, usually on the nasal side, but it may appear at other points. In Milton's case, if his disease was glaucoma, the contraction of the visual field occurred first on the left side of the left eye.[6] The disease usually spares the central vision until very late. A further characteristic of glaucoma is the appearance of a colored halo around bright lights. Yet another is smoky vision, while phosphenes are also a characteristic of glaucoma as well as of other diseases. The disease is mainly one of later life, causing one third of all blindness arising after the fortieth year.

Glaucoma may have been the cause of Milton's blindness, but R. R. James, of London, says, "I do not think that the glaucoma solution will hold water."[7] Sorsby dismisses it partly because in Milton's case the contraction of the visual field took place first on the left side of the left eye.[8] Sorsby[9] and Edward Jackson[10] reject the glaucoma theory for the reason that the condition manifested itself in Milton at an earlier age than glaucoma usually appears. That it can appear earlier is the opinion of a number of leading ophthalmologists, who ascribe Milton's blindness to this disease.

For the most part, scholars in English literature have refrained from expressing any opinion as to the cause of Milton's blindness. William M. Rossetti[11] and W. F. Collier[12] give the cause as paralysis[13] of the optic nerve. William Trent,[14] Professor Emeritus of English Literature at Columbia University, and Edmund Gosse[15] conclude that Milton's blindness was due to glaucoma. Thomas Hall Shastid,[16] M.D., says, "Milton

[5] A limpid fluid filling the space between the crystalline lens and the cornea of the eye.

[6] See "Letter to Philaras."

[7] R. R. James, Manuscript Letter.

[8] Arnold Sorsby, *op. cit.,* p. 346.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] Edward Jackson, Manuscript Letter.

[11] W. M. Rossetti, *Lives of Famous Poets,* London, 1878, p. 74.

[12] W. F. Collier, "Milton," *History of English Literature,* London, 1870, p. 201.

[13] Paralysis is the abolition or impairment of function; loss of the power of voluntary motion or sensation.

[14] William Trent, "Milton," *Encyclopedia Americana,* XIX, 133-39.

[15] Edmund Gosse, "Introduction," in *The Poetical Works of John Milton,* London, 1911. The writer has been unable to see a copy of this work.

[16] Thomas Shastid, *American Encyclopedia of Ophthalmology,* X, 7826.

was blind from glaucoma." Mutschmann[17] in his discussion of albinism says that Prof. Hirschberg[18] of Berlin University told him in a letter that Milton's blindness resulted from glaucoma.

The following statements of some of the outstanding ophthalmologists of the United States are quoted from letters which I received in answer to my question as to what, in their opinion and on the basis of the available evidence, was the cause of Milton's blindness.

While, in my opinion, a positive diagnosis of the cause of Milton's blindness cannot be made, from the data at hand, the weight of the evidence is in favor of glaucoma as the cause.—John E. Weeks, Portland, Oregon; Professor Emeritus, Bellevue Hospital Medical College, New York.

I think it is generally believed that Milton's blindness was due to glaucoma. . . . The early headaches which it was natural for his biographer to think were a warning of what was to come, were nothing of the sort, but were due to an eye-strain which rarely has any effect as a cause of glaucoma.—Walter B. Lancaster, Boston, Massachusetts.

If Milton's blindness was the result of this disease, it may be concluded from Dr. Lancaster's statement that the writing of the *Defence of the English People* could not cause him to become blind more rapidly, since the disease would run its course whether or not he overworked his eyes. This explanation, however, would detract from the dramatic conception held by Milton and his physician and adhered to by succeeding ages that the writing of this book was responsible for Milton's loss of sight.

I would say that Milton undoubtedly suffered from eye strain—due to lack of proper glasses—from his boyhood, and finally developed a simple chronic glaucoma.—Dr. Cassius D. Westcott, President, Chicago Institute of Medicine, Chicago, Illinois.

I think it is the opinion of opthalmologists who have studied the subject that the great poet John Milton became blind from glaucoma. . . . I think that the presumption is very well founded, . . . the disease beginning in his case at the age of about 33 years which is a rather frequent period for the development of such a condition, and which caused in his case complete blindness in ten years.—Dr. William H. Wilder, formerly Professor of Ophthalmology, Rush Medical College, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois.

It should be noted that Dr. Wilder is of the opinion that glaucoma does occur at as early an age as Milton's letter to Philaras suggests.

In my opinion, Milton's blindness was due to the disease known as glaucoma whose essential is increase of intraocular pressure to which the optic nerve yields.—Dr. Joseph Collins, New York City.

I would say that the disease was chronic glaucoma, probably with oc-

[17] Heinrich Mutschmann, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

[18] Prof. Hirschberg is a famous ophthalmologist and his opinion should be of considerable value.

casional acute exacerbations.[19] . . . The disease in the past has always been reckoned as of a type associated with rheumatism or a disease of rheumatic origin.—John Edwin Brown, formerly Ophthalmologist of the State School for Blind, Columbus, Ohio.

The fact that glaucoma and rheumatism have been associated in the past is interesting in view of Milton's gout and eye trouble.

It seems not unreasonable to conclude that glaucoma could have been the cause of the poet's blindness since some of the symptoms described were experienced by Milton; some of the foremost scholars have been of this opinion; the writings of some medical men are in support of the theory; and the manuscript letters quoted above offering glaucoma as a probable conclusion are from outstanding ophthalmologists of today in the United States.

[19] Violent attacks.

CHAPTER VI

MYOPIA AND DETACHMENT OF THE RETINA AS A PROBABLE CAUSE

"I find difficulty," said a physician with whom I conferred in reference to Milton's blindness, "in guessing the nature of the trouble even when the patient is before me." I have said, before, that, with the inadequate material, the exact character of Milton's eye trouble must remain unsolved. Yet the problem has its lure. Let us turn to a discussion of other causes suggested by men no less prominent in the medical field than those previously quoted.

Myopia[1] with detachment of the retina[2] is chief among the causes to be considered. Detachment of the retina often follows in the wake of progressive myopia, producing blindness, though blindness resulting from myopia alone is possible. Let us turn first to a consideration of myopia. In one sense it is not a disease but a structural defect. The normal eye of a new born infant is hypermetropic, farsighted. With an average amount of use in childhood the organ becomes emmetropic or normal. If a child is permitted to do much close work, the eyeball becomes elongated from front to back and myopia is the result. It practically always develops during the growing period, ceasing to develop at about twenty-one years of age. Progressive myopia, however, continues in later life, often with serious damage to sight. According to Kerr,[3] of every hundred pupils leaving the primary schools of England, ten are myopic and one is progressively so. One tenth of the blindness in the United States is ascribed to myopia.

Myopia tends to run in families. If Milton were myopic, this tendency could have been transmitted through several generations, which would explain the weak eyes of his mother, his daughter Deborah, and his granddaughter, Mrs. Foster. It would also explain the reason why his father read without spectacles at eighty-four, for only a myope could read without spectacles at that age.

In order to minimize the dangers resulting from myopia, sight-saving classes have been organized in England and the United States. A single perusal of the rules prescribed for these classes makes one realize that Milton, if he were myopic, broke most if not all of these regulations. Some of these safeguards are proper nutrition, attention to posture, ade-

[1] A condition of the eye in which the rays from distant objects are brought to a focus before reaching the retina; nearsightedness.

[2] Retinal detachment is the separation of the retina from the choroid—the dark coating of the eyeball.

[3] M. J. Rosenau, *op. cit.*, p. 461.

quate sleep, the avoidance of violent exercise on account of the danger of detachment of the retina, and the restriction of reading, which can only be done in daylight and with illumination equivalent to ten foot candles. With reference to this difficulty, it is interesting to note that the majority of myopes have a mental development well above the average and they are quite loath, if not positively unwilling, to forsake the mental life which is so attractive to them.[4] This statement seems most applicable to Milton, and there is every reason to believe that had these restrictions been placed upon him, he would have ignored them.

A number of scholars have attempted to show from a study of his poetry that Milton was or was not a myope. On the face of it, this procedure seems adequate, but the results themselves prove its absurdity. Professor Dufour of Lausanne concluded that Milton suffered from myopia and detachment of the retina. His proof that Milton was myopic is indeed strange. He says, "In his works there is not one description given, not one line, referring to the beauties of nature. . . . Although in the seventeenth century no thought was given to the beauties of nature, his attention to things heard, and indifference to things seen appears to be the chief characteristic of the shortsighted."[5] On the other hand, Landor says of Milton's treatment of nature, "If there was a poet who knew her well and described her in all her loveliness, it was Milton."[6] How Dufour could have made such a statement about Milton's writings is beyond my comprehension. It would seem to me, however, that Landor's statement goes to the other extreme. Were I desirous of learning of nature from the poets of the seventeenth century, I should turn to the works of Marvell, William Browne, Drayton, and Vaughan. But if Milton paid more attention to things heard than to things seen, it was due, I think, to the fact that he, unlike most writers, was both a poet and a musician. Had Milton chosen to describe nature in detail, I have no doubt that he would have been able to do it, even though he were shortsighted, by drawing on his fund of poetic knowledge. If there seems to be an absence of nature in Milton's poems, though I do not believe there is, in this sense at least he might have been a product of his time.

I have heard it said that one can prove anything by the Bible. I am beginning to believe that this is also true of Milton's writings, when I survey the conclusions of Squires and Saurat. Squires found twenty-nine different colors mentioned 181 times in Milton's poetry. This is a small number in view of the quantity of verse written by the poet. According to Squires, he has "a fondness for bright, glistening objects."[7] It is equally

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 462.

[5] M. Dufour, "A Note on Milton's Blindness," *The Ophthalmoscope,* London, VII (1909), 599.

[6] Walter S. Landor, *Imaginary Conversations,* in *Works,* Boston, 1877, IV, 51.

[7] V. P. Squires, "Milton and Nature," *Modern Language Notes,* IX (1894), 473.

true that Milton has a fondness for sombre effects. Read *Paradise Regained* and note in the margin, as I have, the presence of light and dark effects, and the few colors that are mentioned; you will find that your notes bear out Squires's premises but not his conclusions that Milton was myopic. He based his opinion partly upon the absence of color, partly upon the lack of minute detail in description. Saurat takes Squires's tabulation and says of it, "Milton mentions in his works twenty-nine different shades of color; he could, therefore, distinguish them."[8] He also concludes that Milton saw colors at a distance. Let us follow his reasoning, if reasoning it may be called. He quotes a passage from *Paradise Lost:*

> . . . the sun now fall'n
> Beneath the Azores; whether the prime orb,
> Incredible how swift, had thither roll'd
> Diurnal, or this less voluble earth
> By shorter flight to the east, had left him there
> Arraying with reflected *purple* and *gold*
> The clouds that on his western throne attend:
> Now came still evening on, and twilight *gray*
> Had in her sober livery all things clad;
> Silence accompanied, for beast and bird,
> They to their grassy couch, these to their nests
> Were slunk, all but the wakeful nightingale;
> She all night long her amorous descant sung;
> Silence was pleas'd; now glow'd the firmament
> With living *sapphires;* Hesperus, that led
> The starry host, rode brightest, till the moon
> Rising in clouded majesty at length,
> Apparent queen, unveiled her peerless light,
> And o'er the dark her *silver* mantle threw.[9]

In this passage there are five colors, which I have italicized. I agree with Saurat when he says that these are normal colors, but how he concludes from this passage that Milton saw colors, and saw them at a distance, merely because he mentioned them, is unfathomable. "More evidence than naming names must be adduced to prove that a man can distinguish among the things named."[10] Any blind person, though he had never seen, might speak of the red, gold, and violet of a sunrise or a sunset, gleaning his ideas from the descriptions of others or from the books he had read. In confirmation of this view Edward M. Van Cleve, Principal of the New York Institute for the Education of the Blind, says: "The opinion of Saurat, if based upon the passages in *Paradise Lost,* is quite unjustified, in my opinion. Blind people certainly know that the afternoon and evening

[8] Denis Saurat, *op. cit.,* p. 333.

[9] *Paradise Lost,* Book 4, ll. 591-609.

[10] S. A. Nook, "Denis Saurat on Milton's Color Vision," *Modern Language Notes,* XLII (1927), 148.

skies are gorgeous with color. They know it even though they are totally blind and have never seen. Imagery, such as expressed in this famous passage from Milton, could, as you say, all be written from memory, or it might all be written from description. The poetry is not in nature; the poetry is in the soul of the writer."[11]

Let us examine the lines quoted below, noting especially the italicized color words.

> Now *purple* ev'ning ting'd the *blue* serene,
> And milder breezes fann'd the *verdant* plain;
>
> Sweet to the thirsty tongue the *chrystal* stream . . .
>
> From his wan cheek the *rosy* tincture flies;
> The lustre languished in his closing eyes.[12]

Here also a poet mentions colors. Would Saurat say that he therefore saw them and saw them at a distance? They are from the pen of a poet blind from infancy, Thomas Blacklock. It sems to me that these scholarly attempts to prove that Milton was or was not a myope prove nothing and therefore contribute no explanation as to the cause of Milton's blindness. Since one cannot accurately eliminate the effect of the classics upon Milton and the influence of the times in which he wrote, it is impossible to determine from his writings the nature of his eye trouble.

What then was the cause of Milton's blindness? Dr. Edward Jackson, one of the foremost ophthalmologists of the United States and the editor of the *American Journal of Ophthalmology,* Denver, Colorado, writes:

From his father reading at eighty-four without spectacles, and his mother having weak eyes and using spectacles from thirty, it seems probable that Milton inherited a tendency to myopia. This agrees with the statement that from early life "his eyes were none of the quickest." His studious life would increase his myopia, and aggravate the tendency to degenerative changes in the coats of the eye, that commonly go with it. The degeneration, causing atrophy of the choroid and retina, could very well produce blindness by the age of forty-four; with, or without, cataract[13] and detachment of the retina, which frequently are caused by myopia.[14]

It could hardly have been cataract since Milton's eyes showed no blemish, though "dim suffusion" is sometimes interpreted as cataract.

The cause of Milton's blindness which accords with the obtainable facts was chorioretinitis[15] with exudates and possible hemorrhages and in the left eye probably a detachment of the retina: the remote cause of which

[11] Edward M. Van Cleve, Manuscript Letter.

[12] Thomas Blacklock, "A Pastoral, On the Death of Stella," in his *Poetical Works,* Edinburgh, 1795, p. 1179.

[13] An opacity of the crystalline lens or its capsule.

[14] Edward Jackson, Manuscript Letter.

[15] Or choroidoretinitis, inflammation of the retina and the choroid, the dark inner coating of the eye.

was eye strain rendering the eyes susceptible to inflammatory disease; the direct cause being quite likely a toxic infection arising from some focal source.[16]—Park Lewis, M.D., Consulting Ophthalmic Surgeon, New York Central Railroad, Buffalo, New York.

The view of a possible toxic poisoning could correspond to the hypothesis of Dr. Colman Cutler, that Milton's eye trouble and gout were due to a streptococcic infection.[17]

Let us turn now to a consideration of detachment of the retina, which, it should be remembered, is often one of the results of progressive myopia. Detachment of the retina occurs commonly in one eye but may occur in both. The following letters point to this likelihood.

It is probable, that he had "spontaneous detachment of the retina, first of one eye and subsequently also of the fellow eye." It is equally certain that he had "congenital myopia of high or excessive degree, with liquefaction of the vitreous humor and other pathological changes which were the probable predisposing causes, for the hopeless and incurable lesions of both eyes."[18]—Robert Sattler, Ophthalmic Hospital, Cincinnati, Ohio.

This opinion is also held by Ellice M. Alger, Professor of Eye Diseases, New York Postgraduate Medical School, New York City. He writes: "My guess would be retinal detachment first in one eye and then in the other."[19] Saurat dismisses detachment of the retina partly because it is uncommon in both eyes and partly because he feels that he has proved that Milton was not myopic.[20] But if a person could have detachment of the retina in one eye, it is equally possible, though not usual, that he could have it in the other; since it is often the result of violent exercise together with eye strain resulting in subsequent inflammation. And that it does occur in both eyes is evidenced by the statements of the physicians above quoted who would hardly assign as a probable cause a condition which they had not themselves met in their practice.

So far as I have been able to ascertain Professor Dufour was the first to suggest the theory of myopia and detachment of the retina in both eyes as a possible explanation of Milton's blindness.[21] We have elsewhere demonstrated that his proof of myopia is inadequate, though his conception of detachment of the retina in both eyes is borne out by the statements above and by Arnold Sorsby. To quote from the latter:

Abrupt detachment in the left and detachment in the right following on progressive myopic changes in that eye seems to be a likely diagnosis on the strength of Milton's letter, and not an unlikely diagnosis from what we know of myopia.[22]

[16] Dr. Park Lewis, Manuscript Letter.
[17] See Chapter 2.
[18] Robert Sattler, Manuscript Letter.
[19] Ellice M. Alger, Manuscript Letter.
[20] Denis Saurat, *op. cit.*, p. 336.
[21] M. Dufour, *op. cit.*, p. 599.
[22] Arnold Sorsby, *op. cit.*, p. 351.

Dr. William H. Wilmer, of the Johns Hopkins Hospital, however, dismisses the hypothesis of detachment of the retina because this defect comes suddenly, with marked symptoms, and often leads, in the end, to the development of cataract, which makes the disease externally noticeable.[23] In spite of Dr. Wilmer's objection, which should carry considerable force, we are confronted with the ideas of four ophthalmologists whose experience has rendered them capable of no less sound judgment.

Sorsby's letter to me points out that the symptoms are those of glaucoma and of myopia and detachment of the retina. "It is not at all unlikely," he writes, "that Milton's blindness may have been caused by infections prevalent in the England of the seventeenth century and no longer seen. Leaving aside such a probability, the available evidence points to either glaucoma or detachment of the retina supervening on a process of acute myopic degeneration in a myope. Of these views the latter seems more likely."[24] Here we have two possible explanations furnished by equally noteworthy ophthalmologists. This deadlock provokes again the original question, what was the cause of Milton's blindness? Perhaps the best answer is to be found in Dr. Derby's letter. "I . . . am strongly of the opinion that it would only be pure speculation to assign the cause of his blindness. It seems to me that it might be any one of a number of different things."[25]

Summing up the causes ascribed as being responsible for Milton's blindness, it may be noted that there is no evidence supporting the theories of albinism and of congenital syphilis. There is medical authority for the theory of a streptococcic infection which could also cause arthritis. Some scholars favor the theory of paralysis of the optic nerve, while others accept the glaucoma solution. There is considerable medical evidence in favor of the glaucoma theory and in favor of the theory of myopia and detachment of the retina. Of the causes presented above, streptococcic infection, glaucoma, and myopia and detachment of the retina are the most plausible. Yet in view of the limited information which has come down to us, the lack of ophthalmological knowledge of the seventeenth century, and the diversity of opinion of the leading ophthalmologists both in the United States and in Great Britain, the cause of Milton's blindness remains, and must remain, unsolved.

[23] W. H. Wilmer, Manuscript Letter.

[24] Arnold Sorsby, Manuscript Letter.

[25] George S. Derby, Professor of Ophthalmology, Harvard Medical School, Manuscript Letter.

PART TWO

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES TO HIS BLINDNESS

CHAPTER VII

THE SONNETS

The scholar searching for autobiographical material in Milton's writings will find a surprising amount. A considerable portion of this material relates to his blindness, although blind people do not ordinarily discuss their handicap a great deal. Milton's frequent references to his affliction may be due in part to the fact that he was a poet, to whom blindness would have an emotional appeal. They may be due in part to the taunts of his enemies and to the belief that his sight had been sacrificed for the cause of freedom. He was no doubt anxious that the world should know that he felt no regret for the sacrifice that he had made.

The very nature of poetry eliminates the possibility of a definitive interpretation. Each individual lends to a poem his own personality. Two people often find in the same passage different meanings. *De gustibus non est disputandum.* It is quite possible that I may, on account of blindness, find in Milton's poetry an interpretation different from that of the average person. It is equally possible that certain passages may have for me a particular significance. Yet it is this common bond of blindness which should give me an especial understanding of the autobiographical passages in Milton's poetry. This understanding or interpretation may not be that of scholars, yet its value, in part at least, is in the fact that, when I read what Milton has written concerning his blindness, I know, not by hearsay or observation, but by actual experience, something of his emotion.

Of the autobiographical material dealing with Milton's blindness, let us consider first Sonnets XIX, XXII, and XXIII. Of these, Sonnet XIX is the most significant, being in my opinion a masterpiece both of literature and of human experience. To me, the wonders of *Paradise Lost,* the calm and peace of *Paradise Regained,* the tragedy of *Samson Agonistes* have less appeal than this simple but powerful poem.

XIX.

When I consider how my light is spent,
E're half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one Talent which is death to hide,
Lodg'd with me useless, though my Soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest he returning chide,
Doth God exact day-labour, light deny'd,
I fondly ask; But patience to prevent
That murmer, soon replies, God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts, who best
Bear his milde yoak, they serve him best, his State

Is kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
And post o're Land and Ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and waite.

There is, I believe, in English literature no human tragedy so simply depicted as that of the foregoing sonnet. It is a tragedy because, though the end is peaceful, it is the renunciation of poetic achievement seemingly impossible in blindness. It is a tragedy because it contains a conflict, controlled and well-ordered, but obviously a struggle. It is likewise a tragedy because it is the expression of one who has suffered almost beyond human endurance and has emerged without bitterness of spirit or reproach against his grievous fate.

"In that noble sonnet on his blindness," writes Serrell, "which has furnished a topic of consolation for countless sufferers incapacitated by bodily affliction from active service of God and their kind, we seem to trace in the poet's mind a very natural conflict of somewhat inconsistent thoughts."[1] I agree with Serrell that there is a conflict of thought, but to me the thoughts are in no sense inconsistent. There are two very definite elements: on the one hand, the "talent which is death to hide"; on the other, the inability to use this talent. This conflict ends in calm submission to the sacrifice of all he holds dear. "They also serve who only stand and wait."

Let us turn to Tillyard's opinion of this sonnet.

There is in it a tone of self-abasement. . . . In *Lycidas* the deed is personal, the exercise of Milton's creative faculty: in the sonnet it is the passive yielding to God's command; Milton crouches in humble expectation, like a beaten dog ready to wag its tail at the smallest token of its master's attention.[2]

It should always be borne in mind that in Milton's day God was supposed to be the bestower of blessings and punishments. Even if we do not agree with such a belief, we cannot but respect Milton for his acquiescence to the seemingly inevitable. The "beaten dog" attitude portrayed by Tillyard is to me not apparent and is in no sense compatible with the lofty resignation which a majority of readers usually find in this sonnet. Huskinson, writing on the psychology of the blind, says:

It may be granted from the beginning that almost every blinded man goes through his "bad period" some time or other. . . . Depression is like almost every other disease, it has its period of incubation, its "crisis" and its convalescence. Were the "crisis" never to pass away, the man must necessarily go mad.[3]

It seems quite legitimate to me that Milton should have experienced such a depression. The sonnet would cease to hold its fascination if I felt that

[1] George Serrell, "Milton as seen in his Sonnets," *Temple Bar,* CXXI (1900), p. 38.

[2] E. M. Tillyard, *Milton,* London, 1930, p. 190.

[3] R. K. Huskinson, "The Psychology of the Blinded Soldier," in Sir Arthur Pearson, *Victory over Blindness,* London, 1919, pp. 306-7.

he was either superhuman or "cringing." Is it because I have experienced a like struggle, because I know the restraint necessitated by blindness, because I too have had to bow in submission to the inevitable, that I place Sonnet XIX first in my "Golden Treasury"? It may very well be. But whatever the explanation, it would seem almost worth being blind to have suffered and to have expressed this suffering and to have left to succeeding ages this marvellous epitome of personal defeat and ultimate triumph.

"Not a sound of repining do we hear in the presence of almost overwhelming misfortune . . . ," says Alden Sampson.[4] And yet it seems to me that the first eight lines are nothing but repining. But why should not a man whose life work seems thwarted by blindness have rare moments of intense grief? It is these moments of deep feeling that produce the final peace.

Perhaps the sanest interpretation of Sonnet XIX comes from the pen of James Montgomery:

> Nor must the sonnet on his blindness be overlooked. Though severely simple in style, and remarkably abrupt in the cadences, it is, in quiet grandeur of sentiment, one of the noblest records of human feeling, at once subdued and sublimed by resignation to the divine will. Milton is never more himself than when he speaks of himself. Here we are let into the inmost sanctuary of his mind, and hearken, as it were, to the invisible spirit there communing with itself, amid the darkness of external nature, till light from heaven, suddenly breaking in upon him, reveals God in his "kingly state."[5]

This evaluation by Montgomery is in my opinion both accurate and comprehending. It permits of sorrow, of spiritual conflict, and of the calm that follows storm.

"The wonderful sonnet 'On his Blindness' [and here I am quoting a fragment from de Montmorency] which, marking as it does the advent of a patience that might seem impossible in one of so tempestuous a nature, a patience to which we owe his greatest work. . . ."[6] It might be added that the very nature of blindness forces the learning of patience, no matter how tempestuous the will nor how averse the spirit to the learning of the lesson. I do not mean that blind people are always patient nor that they acquiesce without a struggle; but the standing and waiting, which blindness exacts, brings with it necessarily a certain degree of patience, and he who would resist must inevitably pay. Blindness is not all standing and waiting; it is, however, unquestionably a handicap and produces at times this exacting price.

As to the date of the writing of the nineteenth sonnet, I am inclined to feel that it belongs to the year 1655 rather than earlier. My reason for

[4] Alden Sampson, *Studies in Milton,* New York, 1913, p. 115.

[5] James Montgomery, "Memoir, and Critical Remarks on His Genius and Writings," in John Milton, *Poetical Works,* New York, 1843, I, 29.

[6] J. G. de Montmorency, "Milton and Modern Men," *Contemporary Review,* XCIV (1908), 700.

this view is the control apparent in the portrayal of the conflict. It is as if Milton were looking back upon the struggle rather than experiencing it. Professor Smart[7] has placed its writing at an earlier date, and since he made the study of Milton's sonnets his life work, his opinion should be worth consideration. Tillyard calculates that the sonnet was written in 1652. To quote Tillyard,

> Milton believes that through blindness he is useless for his life's work ("that one Talent . . . lodg'd with me useless"). Could he possibly have uttered that belief after writing *Defensio Secunda* (1654) in spite of his blindness?[8]

Tillyard, like most sighted people, knows little about blindness and does not realize that to the intelligent blind person the handicap is constantly an experiment. This must be particularly true of the individual losing his sight in adult life. He progresses step by step, making new discoveries as to what is possible for him to accomplish. May I illustrate by an experience of my own? It has been my custom to put any original composition into Braille, to correct the Braille, to copy it on the typewriter, and then to have it in turn corrected. Recently, the lack of physical strength and of time led me to question the advisability of the above procedure. I chanced upon an article about Booth Tarkington[9] in which the author tells how he dictates and proof reads his books. It became evident to me that I could follow the same method. Necessity has led me to try this new manner of writing, which to say the least saves much physical exertion and time.[10]

Let us return to the discussion of Tillyard's claim. In writing the *Second Defence,* Milton was answering a challenge. He was defending himself. He was defending Cromwell. His own reputation and appearance had been assailed. The *Cry of the Royal Blood* drove him into action which was most fortunate for him. It may be that the writing of the *Second Defence* did not open to him the possibility of fulfilling the dream for which he had lived and worked for many years. I like to think, though there is no authority for it, that it was after the death of his second wife in 1657 that Milton, plunged into the deepest despair he had yet known, found through this sorrow the conviction that it was still possible for him to leave to posterity a work that would live throughout the ages. In Letter XIV,[11] dated 1654, he wrote to Henry Oldenburg: "It would not be difficult to persuade me to engage in other undertakings." Yet what these "other undertakings" may have been is a question. Of course this quotation could

[7] John Smart, *The Sonnets of Milton, with Introduction and Notes, Glasgow,* 1921.

[8] E. M. Tillyard, *op. cit.,* p. 388.

[9] "Booth Tarkington," *New York Times,* March 27, 1929.

[10] For a discussion of this method of dictation and proofing, see Part Four, Chapter 15.

[11] P. B. Tillyard, *Milton: Private Correspondence,* New York, 1932, p. 29.

be interpreted as referring to his dream of writing a great poetic work. But Milton was not accustomed to refer to his life work in such ordinary language. In the postscript to the 1658 edition of the *First Defence* he refers to his life work in his wonted style. "The Accomplishment of yet greater things, if I have the power—and I shall have the power, if God be gracious—is meanwhile for their sakes my desire and meditation."[12] This, I believe, is the first time since his loss of sight that Milton has directly mentioned the accomplishment of "greater things." I am therefore of the opinion that Sonnet XIX on his blindness was written in 1655, which is also probably the date of Sonnet XXII, if Milton's loss of sight was complete in 1652.

I cannot read the nineteenth sonnet without experiencing the deepest emotion. Submission to the inevitable, not without a conflict, and the sacrifice of some vital desire, are experiences known to every blinded person. To find these experiences so truthfully and simply portrayed is to bring calmness in moments of struggle and comfort beyond expression. For me Milton need have written only these fourteen lines to rank among the foremost poets of England.

If Sonnet XIX expresses Milton's inmost feeling, Sonnet XXII may be said to present the mental attitude, real or assumed, that he wished to have the world think he felt. To the average scholar, Sonnet XXII (to Cyriack Skinner) is a courageous expression of Milton's attitude toward the cause for which he sacrificed his sight. The reader is so moved by the fact that Milton can no longer see the sun, moon, stars, man, and woman, that he fails to grasp the true context of the poem. To me it seems that Milton artfully describes the extent of his loss, not so much for its own sake as to magnify the greatness of his sacrifice. He consoles himself with the thought that "all Europe talks from side to side" of his defence of liberty; but he also finds satisfaction in telling the world that all Europe is praising him. No one would refuse him his consolation, little as it may now seem, even though he endeavored to secure it through self-glorification. This approbation of self was not new to Milton in blindness. With him there was always a conscious striving after greatness, which may sometimes appear as conceit. Milton's conceit, common to most people though not expressed, was after all nothing more than a just estimation of himself. This belief in his ability may have been one of the strongest factors in his adjustment to blindness. Granting that his estimation of self may have been for the best, I cannot find anything portrayed in Sonnet XXII except the magnitude of his sacrifice and self-praise. The development in a blind person of a certain amount of egotism is necessary for the attainment of success, an exhibition of self-assertiveness, since the general public knows little of his ability and believes less in his capability.

Milton certainly wanted the world to think that he suffered no regret

[12] David Masson, *op. cit.*, V, 574.

with reference to the sacrifice he had made. It is possible that he did suffer no regret, though I cannot believe that is likely. There must have been moments at least when he deeply regretted the sacrifice, even rebelled against it. He may have written the sonnet not only for its effect upon others but also for the assurance to himself. Have you ever said to yourself, "God's in his heaven, all's right with the world," not because you actually believed it, but because you knew it was necessary for you to believe it? This may have been Milton's position. To the scholar, however, Sonnet XXII will always contain Milton's declaration of sacrifice without regret and I am content that it should be so.

XXII.

To Mr. Cyriack Skinner *upon his Blindness*

Cyriack, this three years day these eyes, though clear
To outward view, of blemish or of spot;
Bereft of light thir seeing have forgot,
Nor to thir idle orbs doth sight appear
Of Sun or Moon or Starre throughout the year,
Or man or woman. Yet I argue not
Against heavns hand or will, nor bate a jot
Of heart or hope; but still bear up and steer
Right onward. What supports me, dost thou ask?
The conscience, Friend, to have lost them overply'd
In libertyes defence, my noble task,
Of which all Europe talks from side to side.
This thought might lead me through the world's vain mask
Content though blind, had I no better guide.

Sonnet XXIII presents a new and unusual aspect of Milton's life. I find myself wishing that there might have been more of such glimpses. The sonnet is the record of a dream in which his second wife, whom he loved deeply, came back to him. It is all the more a tender experience when we remember that his first marriage had been fraught only with sorrow, disappointment, and incompatibility. It is difficult to understand why this happiness with his second wife, like so many of the good things of life, was so short-lived. Her loving companionship was the most blessed experience in Milton's domestic life. I quote the sonnet here because it is autobiographical and because I wish to discuss one phase of it in particular.

XXIII.

Methought I saw my late espoused Saint
Brought to me like *Alcestis* from the grave,
Whom *Joves* great Son to her glad Husband gave,
Rescu'd from death by force though pale and faint.
Mine as whom washt from spot of child-bed taint,
Purification in the old Law did save,
And such, as yet once more I trust to have
Full sight of her in Heaven without restraint,

Came vested all in white, pure as her mind:
Her face was vail'd, yet to my fancied sight,
Love, sweetness, goodness in her person shin'd
So clear, as in no face with more delight.
But O as to embrace me she enclin'd
I wak'd, she fled, and day brought back my night.

The sonnet is simple and easy of interpretation, except for the clause, "Her face was vail'd." Scholars have construed this as implying that Milton had never seen her face, because he was blind. Therefore they must mean to indicate that he did not see her in his dream. Otherwise the reference would be out of place in the sonnet. I do not believe this is the interpretation Milton would wish. I do believe, however, that he saw his wife in his dream, though not her face, because it was veiled. But "vail'd" does not suggest to me Milton's inability to see her. A study of the dreams of blind people bears out my belief that, save for the veil, Milton could have seen her face.

"Of some two hundred blind persons of both sexes who were questioned, it was found that . . . all whose eyesight was lost after the seventh year had quite as vivid dream visions as normally endowed persons."[13] Sir Arthur Pearson, former principal of St. Dunstan's,[14] blinded in adult life, says:

In my dreams I am never blind. Then I see as I used to; and if I dream of something bringing in people whom I have only known since I lost my sight, they are, unless I have become very intimately acquainted with them, people whose faces are indistinct, though somehow I know who they are. . . . Notes on this subject published in *St. Dunstan's Review* produced evidence which convinced me that many of the blinded men had shared my experience.[15]

From the foregoing, it may be noted: first, that the people known before the loss of sight were still clearly visualized in dreams; second, that the faces of those known after blindness were indistinct unless the persons were very familiar. This seems to be a curious contradiction of Milton's experiences, if the interpretation put by scholars upon "her face was vail'd" is correct. Certainly his wife was intimately known to him and by means of description he would have been able to form a mental picture. Booth Tarkington, who was totally blind for more than a year, relates:

It is difficult for me to realize now . . . that I have never seen several of the nurses who were constant, intimate, bright miracles of resource and endurance. It seemed to me that I saw everything, and so it still seems now; my memory of those months is all in mental pictures.[16]

[13] "Dreams of the Blind," *Harper's Weekly,* LV (Dec. 9, 1911), 25.

[14] The training school in England for the soldiers of the Empire who were blinded in the world war.

[15] Sir Arthur Pearson, *Victory over Blindness,* London, 1919, p. 294.

[16] Booth Tarkington, "Out of the Dark," *American Magazine,* CXIII (April, 1932), 114.

If Milton meant by "vail'd" that the face of his wife was indistinct, his perception must have resembled that of one blind since childhood. People who have never seen have mental images. These images have a rather indistinct outline; they may possess the characteristics of the person imaged, such as "love, sweetness, goodness." They might not be recognizable should the person imaged actually be seen. But this could not have been Milton's case, since he lost his sight in adult life.

I am convinced, however, that the poet meant to indicate that he *saw* his wife. This conviction is based first upon the fact that he knew her face was veiled. If it be objected that he might have known this without seeing, my second reason is proof that he saw her. The last line says that, when he awoke, he could not longer see, "And day brought back my night." If day brought back the condition of blindness, for at least a few minutes of the dream he must have seen, else how could blindness have been brought back? Of course there is the possibility that Milton may have used the expressions "Her face was vail'd" and "Day brought back my night" in a purely poetic sense, though this is not the usual interpretation.

Believing that Milton saw his wife in his dream, I can advance two possible interpretations for "Her face was vail'd." The first is borne out by Saintsbury. He writes:

> Attention has often been drawn to the veiled face of the sonnet as implying that Milton had never seen his wife. It should, however, be remembered that the Alcestis parallel almost requires the veil.[17]

The second explanation is that the veil, being a part of her shroud, carries out the idea that she had come from the grave. No matter what the interpretation, this sonnet is a tender, human experience, deep with feeling, and enhanced by the realization that only in dreams and for but a moment could Milton regain the sight that he had so courageously sacrificed.

[17] George Saintsbury, "Milton," *Cambridge History of English Literature,* New York, 1916, VII, 120.

CHAPTER VIII

PARADISE LOST

In *Paradise Lost* there are two autobiographical passages that refer directly to Milton's blindness. Both of these passages are familiar to every Milton scholar. I am discussing them because my interpretation of them is not that of most writers. The first passage is by far the more important with reference to Milton's blindness. The second is shorter and receives less comment.

The hymn to light comes as a contrast to the scenes in Hell depicted in the first two books. All of Book Three carries out that contrast. Following the hymn to light, and so closely connected with it that the separation of the two is impossible, comes the first autobiographical passage. It is generally considered as a lament for Milton's loss of sight; if it is a lament, it does not harmonize with the spirit of Book Three. There may be said to be two distinct parts to this autobiographical section. In the first, Milton lists the things he no longer sees, such as,

> Day, or the sweet approach of Ev'n or Morn
> Or sight of vernal bloom, or Summers Rose,
> Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine;

not to lament their loss, but by contrast to make clear his gain. "So much the rather thou Celestial light Shine inward" is the theme of the second part.

Taken as a whole the passage seems to me to be a hallelujah rather than a lament.

> Hail holy light, ofspring of Heav'n first-born
> Or of th' Eternal Coeternal beam
> May I express thee unblam'd? since God is light,
> And never but in unapproached light
> Dwelt from Eternitie, dwelt then in thee,
> Bright effluence of bright essence increate.
> Or hear'st thou rather pure Ethereal stream,
> Whose Fountain who shall tell? before the Sun,
> Before the Heavens thou wert, and at the voice
> Of God, as with a Mantle didst invest
> The rising world of waters dark and deep,
> Won from the void and formless infinite.
> Thee I re-visit now with bolder wing,
> Escap't the *Stygian* Pool, though long detain'd
> In that obscure sojourn, while in my flight
> Through utter and through middle darkness borne
> With other notes then to th' *Orphean* Lyre
> I sung of *Chaos* and *Eternal Night,*

Taught by the heav'nly Muse to venture down
The dark descent, and up to reascend,
Though hard and rare: thee I revisit safe,
And feel thy sovran vital Lamp; but thou
Revisit'st not these eyes, that rowle in vain
To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn;
So thick a drop serene hath quenched thir Orbs,
Or dim suffusion veild. Yet not the more
Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt
Cleer Spring, or shadie Grove, or Sunnie Hill,
Smit with the love of sacred song; but chief
Thee *Sion* and the flowrie Brooks beneath
That wash thy hallowd feet, and warbling flow,
Nightly I visit: nor sometimes forget
Those other two equal'd with me in Fate,
So were I equal'd with them in renown,
Blind *Thamyris* and blind *Maeonides,*
And *Tiresias* and *Phineus* Prophets old.
Then feed on thoughts, that voluntarie move
Harmonious numbers; as the wakeful Bird
Sings darkling, and in shadiest Covert hid
Tunes her nocturnal Note. Thus with the Year
Seasons return, but not to me returns
Day, or the sweet approach of Ev'n or Morn,
Or sight of vernal bloom, or Summers Rose,
Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine;
But cloud in stead, and ever-during dark
Surrounds me, from the chearful waies of men
Cut off, and for the Book of knowledg fair
Presented with a Universal blanc
Of Natures works to mee expung'd and ras'd,
And wisdome at one entrance quite shut out.
So much the rather thou Celestial light
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight.[1]

Samuel Wesley, in his preface to the "Life of our Blessed Lord" (1693), said of this passage, "His discourse of Light is incomparable; and I think 'twas worth while to be blind to be its author."[2] Allowing that Wesley could know nothing, fortunately for him, of what it is like to be blind, the tribute is none the less appropriate. It seems to me to be exactly the attitude which Milton himself exhibits. He sums up his losses, compares them with the gain, and concludes that it is worth while to be blind, if as a

[1] *Paradise Lost,* Book III, ll. 1-55.

[2] Raymond Havens, Seventeenth Century Notices of Milton," *Englische Studien,* Leipzig, XL (1908-9), 180.

result he may write of Heaven and Hell, of the ways of God to man, and sing as no poet has sung before or since of what in his blindness he saw and felt.

Quiller-Couch seems to be of the same opinion when he writes:

Let us move on to the passage where, for once in this great impersonal epic, the personal Milton breaks forth—breaks out of conscious physical blindness and, on the very strength of its weakness, challenges a light unendurable by happier normal eyes. . . . The main word, you perceive, is of blindness; of blindness groping, aching, back toward light remembered. But consider how melody—melody of Sion's brooks, melody of the hidden "darkling bird"—melts into it; consider how all these at the end compressed back upon the inner soul *there* find the light to match the divine light, sublimity to challenge sublimity. It is only in solitude or darkness that the brightest light can be read, as it is only through smoked spectacles that our eyes can endure the extreme flames of astronomy.[3]

The quotations above refer, I believe, to the passage as a whole. Let us turn next to a discussion of the autobiographical passage alone.

Of this passage Charles D. Yonge writes, "In the third book of *Paradise Lost,* Milton speaks with a manly resignation though with a deep feeling of the privation of his blindness."[4] I cannot believe that Milton meant to leave with his readers the thought of his privation as such. Here again the mind of the sighted critic fails to grasp the significant lines on account of its emotional reaction to blindness. As for resignation, Milton certainly had to reach that stage before he could speak joyfully, nay even calmly, of the benefits resulting from his losses.

In my opinion Professor Erskine, also, has erred in placing the emphasis on the first part of the passage.

He was blind, and the loss of his sight in middle life weighed upon him, and compelled him to say something of his affliction, as though we were in the room with him, and he felt it more courteous to speak of it than to pretend we didn't know.[5]

To Erskine the deprivations seem to be the central theme of the passage. This, to say the least, does not take into consideration the closing lines, which contain Milton's most significant thoughts. No one would deny that blindness has its deprivations. That it has compensations is recognized by every sightless person. To Milton these compensations meant a great deal, and it is, I believe, the thought of these benefits that he would leave with the reader. "So much the rather thou Celestial light Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers Irradiate." Milton believed that as a result of blindness he possessed the Celestial light to a greater degree than former-

[3] Arthur Quiller-Couch, *Studies in Literature,* second series, Cambridge, 1922, II, 90-93.

[4] Charles Yonge, "Milton," *Three Centuries of English Literature,* New York, 1874, p. 192.

[5] John Erskine, *The Delight of Great Books,* Indianapolis, 1928, p. 174.

ly. It is no doubt difficult for the average person to comprehend that blindness has some advantages. But it is the realization of these compensations that helps to make it endurable.

Let us turn to a study of certain words and phrases in this autobiographical passage. Milton says of light, "Thee I revisit safe." The interpretation of the passage hinges upon the interpretation of "safe." The word carries with it a very definite psychological experience, besides the evident meaning. Milton has figuratively visited Hell. He has suffered the torment of his deprivation. Yet he can now revisit light, not only with resignation, but with the assurance that he is safe from the pitfall of discontent.

The lines, "Yet not the more Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt . . . ," are not easy of interpretation. It seems to me that Milton is trying to say to us that, though he is no longer able to see the light, yet he visits the muse not less but more than before his loss of sight. Later lines bear out this interpretation: "but chief Thee Sion . . . Nightly I visit." Certainly from 1640 through 1654 Milton did not nightly commune with the muses, on account of the writing of the political pamphlets, the religious tracts, the treatises on divorce, the *Defences,* and so forth. Now in blindness he found more time for his poetical writing, the kind of work for which he had studied and planned for many years. It must have been a new source of joy to him that blindness was helping to make his aspiration more possible. He found, doubtless, that this was one of the greatest compensations of "the dark."

A few lines farther on Milton says, "And wisdom at *one* entrance quite shut out." It is significant that he says *one* entrance, and from what follows I am given the impression that the one entrance seemed to him smaller than that which had been opened to him, partly, at least, through the closing of the first; for he says, "So much the rather thou Celestial light Shine inward." The "rather" seems to me to have two purposes: the first, to indicate that the one entrance is shut off in order that the Celestial light may shine in; the second, to entreat that, since one entrance is shut off, the Celestial light may shine inward the more, so that Milton may "see and tell of things invisible to mortal sight." It is my impression that he believed his appeal was being answered.

Blindness is a handicap which each individual must meet in his own way. Only a few blind people are poets; more are ordinary human beings; to the average intelligent blind person, *Paradise Lost,* with its expression of human triumph, is an unfailing source of inspiration, for into the experience which Milton described he, too, would fain enter.

Referring now to the apostrophe to light, it is surprising to note the different interpretations put upon it, or, more correctly speaking, upon Milton's reaction to light as it appears to scholars. Let us consider first Mutschmann's idea, which results from his theory of albinism. He had an "ax to grind." Milton, accordingly, had to suffer from photophobia, or

fear of light, in order to meet the requirements of albinism. Mutschmann thinks that Milton gave to Satan this quality of photophobia. This might explain why the Archfiend fell from the Realms of Light. About 1644, with the approach of blindness, Milton, according to Mutschmann, no longer feared light, but, on the contrary, so adored it that he wrote, later, the famous apostrophe.[6]

In contrast to Mutschmann Bailey says, "What is more frequent than light in the Miltonic vision? And is not that . . . a foretaste of the Milton who, all his life, blind or seeing, felt the joy and wonder of light as no other man ever did?"[7] It seems to me that Bailey has been a little extravagant when he characterizes Milton in this way. He might have claimed more precisely that Milton *expressed* the wonder of light as no other man ever did. Even if a poet of normal vision had written *Paradise Lost,* he might have opened the scene in Heaven with an apostrophe to light for artistic purposes. What could be more fitting than such an apostrophe in contrast to the previous scenes in darkest Hell? One wonders if Milton's fondness for light would ever have been emphasized by scholars if he had not gone blind.

Some writers feel that the apostrophe to light grew out of Milton's loss of sight. But according to Alden Sampson,

> the predilection is one, as we have seen, which existed before that calamity overtook him. In that passage of the tragedy which he contemplated writing in dramatic form on the theme of the fall of man, composed in 1642, ten years before blindness finally closed about him, is an eloquent apostrophe to the sun.[8]

I am unable to reconcile this apostrophe to the sun with Mutschmann's "photophobia." It may indicate a predilection for light or it may also have been written for some artistic effect involved in the drama. We should remember that Milton as a poet would try to select poetic material. What would be more lyrical than hymns to nature, the sun, morning, evening, and the like?

Of Milton, Sampson says, "A passion for light, and a hatred of the dark, controlled him."[9] One of the examples that he cites of this hatred of the darkness is the scene, after the fall of man, in which Milton says that the nights became dark. The poet was forced to indicate some physical changes after the fall, and the fact that the nights became dark may be more sensibly interpreted as a contrast, rather than as an obsession. I have known many blind people and I have yet to find one who either hates or dreads the dark. The fear of the dark so often experienced by small children has no place in the blind child's world. It may have been also that the dark to

[6] Heinrich Mutschmann, "Milton's Eyesight and the Chronology of his Works," *Acta et commentationes,* Dorpat, 1925, Vol. V, Sec. B.

[7] John Bailey, *Milton,* New York, 1915, p. 96.

[8] Alden Sampson, *op. cit.,* p. 222. [9] *Ibid.,* p. 223.

which Milton refers is a dark of his memory. I have elsewhere stated that to some blind people, at least, the world appears not as black darkness but as grayish hue, always the same, day or night. Milton, by preference, did most of his composing at night. Would this indicate a hatred of the dark?

In the second autobiographical passage of *Paradise Lost* referring to his blindness, Milton speaks of being "in darkness," which is perhaps a more poetic way of saying that he was blind. To quote the lines:

> More safe I sing with mortal voice, unchang'd
> To hoarce or mute, though fall'n on evil dayes,
> On evil dayes though fall'n, and evil tongues;
> In darkness, and with dangers compast round,
> And Solitude; yet not alone, while thou
> Visit'st my slumbers Nightly, or when Morn
> Purples the East.[10]

I find myself connecting this passage with the early days of the Restoration when Milton, knowing the fate of Vane and others, awaited the decision of Parliament with reference to his own case. His anxiety was probably further augmented by the fact that to the blind escape is almost utterly impossible. It was not blindness, "darkness," but the perturbation caused by the feeling of inevitability which would most concern him.

In conclusion I would suggest that the autobiographical passages be not too literally interpreted. It seems to me that we have acquired the tendency of reading into poetic passages ideas that the authors did not intend. This tendency might almost make a writer afraid to express himself. Poetry does to some extent mirror the poet. But we should look at the spirit of the poem taken as a whole and at the artistic effects sought rather than at the mere wording of a specific passage.

[10] *Paradise Lost,* Book VII, ll. 24-30.

CHAPTER IX

THE THREE DEFENCES

In a discussion of the autobiographical passages in Milton's writings, the three *Defences* must be considered, with special attention given to the *Second Defence of the English People.* Every one is familiar with the condition under which the books were written, but a brief review may not come amiss.

After the execution of Charles the First in 1649, his son, later Charles the Second, ordered the writing by Salmasius, a French scholar, of the book, *Defensio regia pro Carolo I,* for which he, Charles, paid one hundred pounds. The work was rapidly circulated throughout western Europe and had no small amount of influence. To check the ever-growing popularity of Salmasius' book, the English Council engaged Milton to write a defense of the English people. The *Defensio pro populo Anglicano* appeared in 1651. Its success was marked, the author himself writing,

> . . . my noble task,
> Of which all Europe talks from side to side.

It may have been as a result of this publication that Salmasius left the Swedish court in 1651; he died in 1653, but not before he had written his *Responsio,* which was not published until 1660. Salmasius' friends took up the quarrel and in 1652 appeared *Regii sanguinis clamor ad coelum . . . contra parricidas Anglicanos* (*The Cry of the Royal Blood to Heaven against the English Parricides*) by Peter Du Moulin. The book was issued anonymously with a dedicatory letter by Alexander More. Milton assumed accordingly that the *Cry of the Royal Blood* had been written by him. The *Second Defence of the English People,* published in 1654, aimed its counter-blows at the unfortunate More, who replied with his *Alexandri Mori . . . fides publica, contra calumnias Ioannis Miltoni scurrae* in 1655. Milton ended the word battle in the same year with *Defensio pro se.*

Since Milton was not totally blind until 1652 and since the *First Defence* was published in 1651, it does not rightfully belong to the period of his life which we are studying. There seems, however, to be some justification for referring to it, since Milton had been warned by his physicians that the fulfillment of the task of answering Salmasius would certainly result in blindness. As I read the contents of the *First Defence,* it appears to be scurrilous and mediocre and to justify but little the sacrifice of sight. Most scholars will not agree with this view. The book's "main interest," says Masson,

lies now, as it did at the time, in the terrific onslaught made in it on Salmasius personally. . . . *Fool, Beetle, ass, blockhead, liar, slanderer, apostate, idiot, wretch, ignoramus, vagabond* . . . these or their equivalents are the epithets applied to Salmasius page after page, and almost sentence after sentence, with marvellous recklessness, and yet a most curious fertility and ingenuity in Latin Billingsgate. . . . It is in such cases (when bringing in Madame Salmasius), but indeed pretty generally throughout, that one asks whether such licence in personal scurrility was worthy of Milton. . . . There are decencies and limits . . . in civilized warfare; and, with all allowance for the customs of controversy in Milton's time, one cannot always excuse him.[1]

Yet in its day the success of the *Defensio pro populo Anglicano* was indeed marked. Milton's sacrifice in the cause for which he was working differed little from that of the soldier fighting in Cromwell's army, except that he knew exactly what the result would be.

I am inclined to believe that if it had not been the *First Defence* which brought on blindness more rapidly, it would have been something else. Milton was first, last, and always a scholar. He would probably have wanted to make the most of the sight left to him. It is said of Booth Tarkington, "As long as his eyes held out, he wrote every day, including Sunday,"[2] though he, too, had been warned and was not writing a *Defence of the English People.* I recall a similar instance of a schoolmate of mine who was very definitely told that, if she did not stop reading, she would certainly go blind. She paid little heed to the admonition, and blindness was the inevitable result. There is, too, in the human mind an idea that this thing which has happened to some one else "couldn't happen to me." The fact remains, however, that after the completion of the *First Defence of the English People* Milton was totally blind.

In the preface to the *First Defence* the poet says:

I had neither words nor arguments long to seek for the defence of so good a cause, if I had enjoyed such a measure of health, as would have endured the fatigue of writing. And being but weak in body, I am forced to write by piecemeal, and break off almost every hour, though the subject be such as requires an unintermitted study and intenseness of mind.[3]

There is every reason to assume that this weakness of body, this writing by piecemeal was due in part to the ever growing difficulty of failing vision. It is a fact that people losing their sight are loath to refer to it, and it is interesting to note that in Milton's writings we find no reference to eye trouble until blindness was complete.

If there is nothing referring to blindness in the *First Defence,* this is

[1] David Masson, *op. cit.,* IV, 262-64.

[2] "Booth Tarkington," in *Living Authors,* edited by Dilly Tante, *pseud.* New York, 1931, p. 400.

[3] *Introduction to the Prose and Poetical Works* . . . comprising all the Autobiographic Passages, edited by Hiram Corson, New York, 1899, p. 5.

certainly not true of the *Second Defence*. It seems to me that it contains more autobiographical material than any other of Milton's writings. Much of the *Second Defence* is given over to violent invective against More, but the passages devoted to himself and to Cromwell appear in striking contrast. When we come upon these passages, it is as if we emerged from the dark, stifling atmosphere of a cave into sunshine and fresh air. I find myself regretting that so much of Milton's eyesight, strength, and talent had to be used in violent criticism.

Let us turn now to selections alluding to his blindness in the *Second Defence* and to a discussion of them. It seems advisable to omit here passages already cited.

"But with Saumaise, I conceive, my warfare is concluded, since he is now dead—how dead, I will not say: for I will not make his loss of life matter of reproach to him, as he did my loss of sight to me."[4] Through what channel Milton learned of the reproach of Salmasius is not evident, since the *Responsio* did not appear until 1660. It is not a little surprising to me how seriously Milton regarded the taunts hurled at him. It was difficult for him to consider them merely as invective and dismiss them as such. Of course, it was the fashion then to answer any violent attacks, but Milton's reactions seem to indicate that he was extremely sensitive.

"You shall be constrained, in fine, to allow for the rest of your life, either that I am not blind, or at least that I have eyes for you."[5] This sentence is addressed to Alexander More, who Milton supposed, or liked to suppose, was the author of the *Cry of the Royal Blood*. More alleged that Milton knew the real author of the book. But if he did, he must have preferred to attack him rather than Du Moulin, as More's character was not without reproach.

He[6] reproaches me with my form, and my blindness. In his page I am

Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum.
(A monster—horrid, hideous, huge, and blind.)

I certainly never imagined that, with respect to person, there would be instituted any competition between me and a Cyclops.[7]

The quotation, "A monster—horrid, hideous, huge, and blind," was taken from Vergil, and More claimed that when he wrote it he did not know that Milton was blind. I rather question his statement, since the news of Milton's loss of sight would spread rapidly throughout Europe. To his enemies it would doubtless furnish a source of satisfaction and news of such a nature travels rapidly.

If Milton's enemies taunted him with his blindness, it is not at all surprising, since he did not hesitate to chide them with their weaknesses and

[4] *Second Defence*, p. 58. [5] *Ibid.*
[6] More, author of the dedicatory letter.
[7] *Second Defence*, p. 58.

faults. It may seem a little hard that they should have used blindness as a term of opprobrium, but they were of course aiming to strike as severe a blow at him as he had dealt them.

"The spirit and the strength remains, still unimpaired; my eyes alone have failed: and yet they are as unblemished in appearance, as lucid and as free from spot, as those which possess the sharpest vision. In this instance alone am I, most reluctantly, a deceiver."[8] If Milton alone had said that his eyes were without blemish I would pay little heed to the statement. He himself would not be in a position to know the appearance of his eyes. He would have to depend upon the word of others. His friends, knowing his pride, might find it hard to tell the exact truth, had the disease caused any disfigurement. Since, however, the anonymous "Life" bears out the statement of normal appearance, there is no reason to doubt that he had been correctly informed.

Would it were in my power . . . to refute the charge, which my unfeeling adversary brings against me, of blindness! Alas! it is not, and I must therefore submit to it. It is not, however miserable to be blind. He only is miserable, who cannot bear his blindness with fortitude; and why should I not bear a calamity, to which every man's mind should be disciplined, on the contingency of its happening, to bear with patience; a calamity, to the contingency of which every man, by the condition of his nature, is exposed, and which I know to have been the lot of some of the greatest and the best of my species? Among those I might reckon many of the wisest of the bards of remote antiquity, whose loss of sight the Gods are said to have compensated with far more valuable endowments; and whose virtues mankind held in such veneration, as rather to choose to arraign heaven itself of injustice, than to deem their blindness as proof of their having deserved it. . . .[9]

It is not miserable to be blind. I have sometimes thought that perhaps the best word for it is *inconvenient.* The blind need to exert undue patience with reference to their affliction since, on account of their dependency, their lives are closely knit with their helpers. Resistance to the inevitable would make their companionship both undesirable and trying. It has seemed to me, however, that the blind make the adjustment to their handicap perhaps as happily as any group of afflicted people. It should also be remembered that every individual has some kind of burden, and, while blindness is not the lightest, it appears heavier to the sighted world than to the blind themselves. After all, few of us would willingly surrender our burden for that of another. Milton constantly finds consolation in recalling great men who like himself were blind. We find a similar reference to Tiresias and Phineus, whom Milton mentions in what follows the above quotation, in Book Three of *Paradise Lost.*

In the *Second Defence* Milton adds to his list of great men who were without vision Timoleon of Corinth, who saved his own state and Sicily

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 60-72.

from oppression; Appius Claudius, who by his eloquence freed Italy from the inroads of Pyrrhus; Caecilius Metellus, who saved Rome; Dandolo of Venice; General Zisca, who defended Christianity; and Jerome Zanchius, a divine. He continues:

. . . even the Patriarch Isaac, than whom no one was ever more beloved by his Maker, lived for some years blind, as did also his son Jacob, an equal favourite with heaven; and . . . our Saviour himself explicitly affirmed, with regard to the man whom he healed, that neither on account of his own sin, nor that of his parents, had he been "blind from his birth."

Here Milton emphasizes the Master's affirmation that the blind man was not paying for the sins of himself or of his ancestors. This expression does not accord with Saurat's implication that Milton, suffering for the sins of his parents, voiced this suffering in *Samson Agonistes*.[10]

I have quoted the passage in which Milton declares that, since he has written only what he believes is right and for the good of the Church and State, he is confident that God has not sent blindness upon him as a punishment. He proceeds as follows:

So that when the office of replying to "The Royal Defence" was publicly assigned to me, though I had to struggle with ill health, and having already lost nearly one of my eyes was expressly fore-warned by my physician that, if I undertook the laborious work in question, I should be deprived of both; undeterred by the warning, I seemed to hear the voice—not of a physician, or from the shrine of Aesculapius at Epidaurus, but of an internal and more divine monitor; and conceiving that by some decree of the fates the alternative of two lots was proposed to me, either to lose my sight or to desert a high duty, I remembered the twin destinies, which the son of Thetis informs us his mother brought back to him from the oracle of Delphi:

> As the Goddess spake, who gave me birth,
> Two fates attend me whilst I live on earth.
> If fix'd I combat by the Trojan wall,
> Deathless my fame, but certain in my fall:
> If I return, beneath my native sky
> My days shall flourish long, my glory die.

I have sometimes tried to imagine what the circumstances were under which Milton made his decision. Did he make his choice quickly? His temperament, the abruptness of his first marriage, the immediate acceptance of his penitent wife would point to such a conclusion. Or did he reflect at great length? Did he wonder what would become of his wife and children in the event of blindness? Did he hesitate because of the probable sacrifice of his poetry, for surely he would think that his genius would have to be sacrificed? Whether the choice was made rapidly or whether it was given hours of reflection can not be ascertained. He tells us only:

[10] Denis Saurat, *op. cit.*, p. 337.

Reflecting therefore with myself that many had purchased less good with greater evil, and had even paid life as the price of glory, while to me the greater good was offered at the expense of the less evil, and an opportunity furnished, simply by incurring blindness, of satisfying the demand of the most honourable duty—a result more substantial, and therefore what ought to be by every one considered as more satisfactory and more eligible, than glory itself—I determined to dedicate the brief enjoyment of my eye-sight, so long as it might be spared me, with as much effort as I could to the public service.

I have suggested elsewhere that, if Milton's blindness had been due to glaucoma, the writing of the *First Defence* could have made little difference in the condition of his eye trouble. But if his blindness were due to myopia and detachment of the retina, the writing of this book could very well have been the determining cause. Whatever the cause of his blindness, Milton had been warned by his physicians that if he wrote the *Defence of the English People* he would lose his sight, and in view of this fact his choice can only be regarded as a sacrifice. To quote again from the *Second Defence:*

You see then what I preferred, what I sacrificed, and what were my motives. Let these slanderers of the divine judgments, therefore, desist from their calumnies, nor any longer make me the subject of their visionary fantasies: let them learn, in fine, that I neither regret my lot, nor repent my choice. . . .

It is usually the case that other people, not the individual affected, believe that affliction is the result of God's anger. If the afflicted one believes this, as in some instances he does, insanity could very easily result. To see in the calamity God's mercy and kindness is the only safe course. Through God's mercy Milton believed that he was able to count his blessings rather than his losses, to value his own achievements above those of his adversaries, and to find in his blindness only visual deprivations, while he maintained that his enemies, including More, were spiritually blind. This may seem a poor kind of consolation, but Milton was writing for publication and for the silencing of his enemies. The passage will best speak for itself:

[Let these slanderers . . . learn . . .] that my opinions continue inflexibly the same, and that I neither feel nor fear for them the anger of God, but on the contrary experience and acknowledge in the most momentous events of my life his mercy and paternal kindness—in nothing more particularly, however, than in his having soothed and strengthened me into an acquiescence in his divine will; led me to reflect rather upon what he has bestowed, than what he has withheld; and determined me to prefer the consciousness of my own achievements to the best deeds of my adversaries, and constantly to cherish the cheering and silent remembrance of them in my breast: finally, in respect of blindness, to think my own (if it must be borne) more tolerable than either theirs, More, or yours. Yours, affecting the inmost optics of the mind, prevents the perception of anything sound

or solid: mine, which you so much abuse, only deprives me of the hue and surface of things, and leaves to my intellectual view whatever they contain of substance and real value.

It may be strange to think of the inability to see as an advantage. But Milton writes: "How many things, in fact, are there, which I should not wish to see; how many, that I should wish to see in vain; and how few, consequently, would remain for my actual enjoyment!" And again, to quote Booth Tarkington: "It is hard for any one who has not been blind to realize what a thrill it is not to have to see everything. It is really marvelous not to look at a lot of things and people that you don't want to see."[11] This same advantage was brought forcibly to my own mind some time ago. I had attended the play, "Green Pastures." As we left the theatre I could think of nothing but the final scene. My guide described to me an unpleasant street happening. My mind resented the intrusion, and I found myself thinking that I was glad that I could not see the occurrence and thus destroy the memory of the play.

There is something both moving and stimulating in the poet's belief in God's protection.

Wretched therefore as you may think it, I feel it no source of anguish to be associated with the blind, the afflicted, the infirm, and the mourners; since I may thus hope that I am more immediately under the favour and protection of my dread Father.

It may not be in accordance with some modern views that the handicapped are under God's special protection, yet I can not refrain from believing that this protection exists, and if we fail to secure it, it is because we do not draw upon it.

After referring to the compensation of God's special protection, Milton continues:

The way to the greatest strength, an Apostle has assured us, lies through weakness; let me then be of all men the weakest, provided that immortal and better vigour exert itself with an efficacy proportioned to my infirmity, provided *the light of God's countenance* shine with intense brilliance upon my darkness. Then shall I at once be most feeble and most mighty, completely blind and thoroughly sharpsighted. O may this weakness insure my consummation, my perfection; and my illumination arise out of this obscurity! In truth, we blind men are not the lowest objects of the care of Providence, who deigns to look upon us with the greater affection and benignity, as we are incapable of looking upon anything but himself. Woe to those that mock or hurt us, protected as we are, and almost consecrated from human injuries, by the ordinances and favour of the Deity; and involved in darkness, not so much from the imperfection of our optic powers, as from the shadow of the creator's wings—a darkness, which he frequently irradiates with an inner and far superior light!

[11] "Booth Tarkington," *New York Times,* March 27, 1929.

I have elsewhere referred to this inner light which Milton feels God has bestowed upon him. Some might find a different explanation of its source in added concentration. But it is sufficient for me that Milton believed in the inner light. Therefore for him it must have existed.

To Milton the blessing of friendship is no small compensation.

To this [darkness] I refer the increased kindness, attentions, and visits of my friends; and that there are some, with whom I can exchange those accents of real friendship. Thus was I not regarded as annihilated by this calamity, or considered as having all my worth and excellence confined to my eyes. Nay, our principal public characters, knowing that my sight had forsaken me, not in a state of torpid inactivity, but while I was strenuously encountering every peril among the foremost in behalf of liberty, do not themselves forsake me: on the contrary, from a view of the uncertainty of all human things, they are kind to me on account of my past services, and obligingly indulge me with an exemption from farther labours; not stripping me of my honours; not taking away my appointment, not curtailing its emoluments; but humanely continuing them to me, in my state of reduced utility, with precisely the same compliment as the Athenians formerly paid to those, to whom they assigned a subsistence in the Prytaneum.

Milton is duly appreciative of the consideration shown him by the government in his, as he says, "reduced utility." Yet I seriously question Milton's "reduced utility," save for the attendance at Council meetings. Nor do I believe that the government would have retained Milton had he failed to do the work assigned him. Human sympathy does not extend so far. I am inclined to feel that the Council believed that there were some things which could be better handled by Milton than by anyone else. I am thinking particularly of the letters concerning the Piedmontese massacre and the treaty with Sweden.

Having dwelt upon his compensations of divine protection and enlightenment, of the faithfulness of friends and of public consideration, Milton closes this particular reference to his blindness in the *Second Defence* with the following:

Thus consoled for my calamity both by God and man, I entreat that no one would lament my loss of sight, incurred in a cause so honourable. Far too be it from me to lament it myself, or to want the spirit readily to despise those who revile me for it, or rather the indulgence still more readily to forgive them.

One of the best known references, which begins, "My father destined me, while I was yet a child," has been quoted in a previous chapter. This, then, is the autobiographical material referring to Milton's blindness in the *Second Defence,* save for one short passage quoted below, which needs no comment.

I entreat that no one would misinterpret, or criminate, or nauseate me for having spoken, or continuing to speak, about myself so much more than I

should naturally have chosen to do: that if I cannot rescue my eyes from blindness, and my name from oblivion or calumny, I may at least rescue my moral character from that obscurity which is coupled with ignominy.[12]

In Milton's *Defence of Himself,* there is no new material regarding his blindness. The lofty sentiment so beautifully expressed in the *Second Defence* is completely lacking here. Milton is both sensitive and proud and the taunts applied to him by his enemies have cut deep and have forced from him another reply. I shall quote these passages from the *Defence of Himself* merely because they refer to his blindness.

But at that time, in an especial manner, I was oppressed with concerns of a far different nature. My health was infirm, I was mourning the recent loss of two relatives, the light had now utterly vanished from my eyes.[13]

It seems, then, that, instead of being a blind man I am metamorphosed into a rain-wind,[14] and have myself collected those clouds of worthless fellows I was determined to drive before me.[15]

You upbraid me however with the blindness of the Cyclops; and to mend your impudence, you repeat the insult, at the very moment that you deny you have given it. The eyes which before were no eyes, are now goggle eyes (exemptiles) and like those of a witch.[16]

The quotations in the *Defences* cited in this chapter are all the references in the *Prose Works* relating to Milton's blindness, except the *Familiar Letters,* which will next be considered. Though in his own time the *First Defence* had the most far-reaching influence, scholars since have given the *Second Defence* the most consideration. Besides furnishing an example of the intricate seventeenth-century prose diction, the *Second Defence* presents a loftiness of tone and beauty of language not surpassed by any other of his prose works. Milton's eulogy of Cromwell and his dissertation on his blindness lift the *Second Defence* above the other two and place it among the foremost writings of the time.

[12] *Second Defence,* p. 105.

[13] John Milton, "The Author's Defence of Himself Against Alexander More," *Milton's Prose Works,* edited by George Burnett, London, 1809, II, 454.

[14] The figure is a Latin one which can not be adequately translated into English.

[15] *The Author's Defence of Himself,* p. 470.

[16] *Ibid.,* p. 507.

CHAPTER X

FAMILIAR LETTERS

In the *Familiar Letters* we might expect to find most of the autobiographical material referring to Milton's blindness. This, however, is not the case, with the one exception of Letter XV. There are scattered references, nevertheless, which deserve quotation and some explanation.

In Letter XI Milton refers to his absence from the Council as due to ill health. Since it is dated February, 1652, it is probable that this ill health is connected with his loss of sight.

Not until Letter XIV, written to Henry Oldenburg, July 6, 1654, do we find a direct reference to his blindness.

> To prepare myself, as you suggest, for other labours—whether nobler or more useful I know not, for what can be nobler or more useful in human affairs than the vindication of Liberty?—truly, if my health shall permit, and this blindness of mine, a sorer affliction than old age, and lastly the "cries" of such brawlers as there have been about me, I shall be induced to *that* easily enough.[1]

That Oldenburg was an intimate friend of the poet is evidenced by the admission that blindness is a greater affliction than old age. This is not the Milton of the *Second Defence,* dwelling upon his compensations. It is a no less human Milton, facing facts and seeing things as they are. There is certainly, however, no self-pity here. He seems particularly sensitive to the taunts of his enemies regarding his blindness, which may have added in no small degree to his affliction.

Letter XV, which is a description of Milton's eye trouble, appeared in the second chapter. Some of the letter does not deal with the discussion of his disease. We refer to these sections here. Milton writes to Philaras, ". . . you . . . continued your kindness to me under that calamity, which can render me a more eligible friend to no one, and to many, perhaps, may make me an object of disregard." Milton may have thought that his blindness could make him a more eligible friend to no one, yet I am inclined to feel that his blindness aided in attracting closer friends. The young men who acted as amanuenses in his dependency must have experienced an added fondness for him. It is not surprising to hear Milton say that to many he might become an object of disregard. Through the earlier centuries the majority of blind people were regarded in this light and Milton could hardly have been unaware of the existence of such an attitude. Education of the blind during the nineteenth century has removed to a great extent the prejudice against this class of the handicapped. In this

[1] *The Works of John Milton,* Columbia University Press, forthcoming volume.

letter, as in the *Second Defence,* Milton reminds us that his darkness is made less oppressive by study, leisure, and the kind conversation of friends. Time for study and leisure for reflection must have been sources of great joy to Milton, when we recall how crowded with activities the past fifteen years had been for him. The idea of added enlightenment, Milton also refers to in *Paradise Lost* and the *Second Defence.* Who can say that such enlightenment does not result? The belief in such a compensation should, I think, help to make it more possible. Near the conclusion of the letter Milton writes, "Shall I not cheerfully bid my eyes keep holiday . . . ?" Only a poet and perhaps only Milton would ever have thought to refer to his blindness in such a happy manner.

Letter XX, written to Peter Heimbach, November 8, 1656, is in answer to information concerning the price of an atlas.

Since to me at least, on account of my blindness, painted maps can hardly be of use, vainly surveying as I do with blind eyes the actual globe of the earth, I am afraid that the bigger the price at which I should buy that book the greater would seem to me my grief over my deprivation.

It seems strange that Milton should wish to know the price and later make such definite objections to having the book. It would appear that he was in a different frame of mind when he wrote previously requesting the information. Under ordinary circumstances he would doubtless have wanted the book in order that his readers might refer to it for him. The blind often have in their possession things that they cannot use directly.

Letter XXI, written to Emeric Bigot, March 24, 1656, portrays the mood exactly opposite to that of Letter XX. It is not to be expected that Milton should maintain this mood of serenity without interruption. Nor is it to be supposed that the tone of Letter XX was usual with Milton. Letter XXI is in the same tenor as *Paradise Lost,* Book Three. This is doubtless the attitude that Milton presented to most of his acquaintances.

I am glad, therefore, to know that you are assured of my tranquility of spirit in this great affliction of loss of sight, and also of the pleasure I have in being civil and attentive in the reception of visitors from abroad. Why, in truth, should I not bear gently the deprivation of sight, when I may hope that it is not so much lost as revoked and retracted inwards, for the sharpening rather than the blunting of my mental edge? Whence it is that I neither think of books with anger, nor quite intermit the study of them, grievously though they have mulcted me—were it only that I am instructed against such moroseness by the example of King Telephus of the Mysians, who refused not to be cured in the end by the weapon that had wounded him.

Letter XXVII, written to Peter Heimbach, December 18, 1657, does not deal with Milton's blindness, but bears, I believe, indirectly upon it.

. . . you ask me to recommend you, through Lord Lawrence, to our Minister appointed to Holland. I really regret that this is not in my power, both be-

cause of my very few intimacies with the men of influence, almost shut up at home, as I am, and as I prefer to be. . . .

This letter seems to me to display considerable wisdom on Milton's part. Perhaps he did not have as little power as he represents. He seems rather to prefer not to make use of his position.

In Letter XXXI, also to Peter Heimbach, dated August 16, 1666, Milton complains of the difficulties of dictation.

And now I will conclude, after first begging you, if you find anything incorrectly written or without punctuation here, to impute that to the boy who has taken it down from my dictation, and who is utterly ignorant of Latin, so that I was forced, while dictating, not without misery, to spell out the letters of the words one by one.

In the Hamilton collection of papers relating to Milton's life there is the following recommendation:

If upon the death of Mr. Wakerley (Weckherlyn), the council thinke that I shall need any assistant in the performance of my place (though for my part I find noe encumberance of that which belongs to me, except it be in point of attendance at conferences with ambassadors, which I must confesse in my condition I am not fit for), it would be hard for them to find a man soe fit every way for that purpose as this gentleman, (Andrew Marvell).[2]

The recommendation of Marvell as Milton's assistant was made in 1653. The appointment was not made until 1657, just why is not known. Here we find that Milton feels that he is able to do all the work required of the Latin Secretary. This to the average person may seem a trifle presumptuous. Yet this attitude was the only safe one for Milton to assume if he wished to be successful; and it was necessary for him to assume this attitude if he wished the Council to feel confidence in him. With reference to the newly blinded person, the general tendency is to imagine him incapable of doing many things that are really possible. Only his own confidence will secure for him the chance of demonstrating his ability. The question of attendance at conferences is indeed an interesting one. Ill health could not always have been the explanation, for Milton was able to carry on his other duties. What then was the reason for his inability to attend? Of course, for Milton to go about alone at his age, in consideration of the condition of London, would hardly have been feasible. Attendance at the Council would therefore necessitate a guide. It seems likely that he may have objected to being escorted to the meeting. This, I think, is a perfectly natural state of mind resulting from his newly acquired handicap. He would feel, and rightly so, that the average person, seeing him dependent upon a guide in public places, would be led to measure his mental and physical abilities by this dependency. To the sightless, being

[2] Douglas Hamilton, *Original Papers, Illustrative of the Life and Works of John Milton*, London, 1859, pp. 22-23.

led about at public functions is almost a necessary evil, and yet it is this condition, more than any other, upon which the public mind bases its impression of utter dependency. It seems to me, therefore, that, though ill health may have been a contributing factor, the chief reason for Milton's inability to attend the meetings of the Council was that which has been suggested or some similar mental deterrent resulting from loss of sight.

Here, then, are the few references to his blindness in the *Familiar Letters*. If they seem to the reader infrequent, I would remind him that in the letters which are the most personal of Milton's writings, he would be the least apt to speak of his affliction, for the blind are not wont to refer often to their handicap.

PART THREE

MILTON AS REFLECTED IN HIS POETRY

CHAPTER XI

THE PSALMS

Among the students of literature, there are those who believe that the poet and the poem have no real connection. They maintain that the bard may sing of love or nature and yet have drawn both from his imagination. There must be, however, a time, or times, when the poet builds out of his own experiences, his own sufferings and testings, the song he sings. Some of his characters voice his beliefs, his sentiments, his inmost longings and trials, his defeats and victories.

Thus, I believe, in the choice of the Psalms which Milton translated into verse in 1653, he revealed some of the struggles and emotional crises following his loss of sight. What the struggles of those first dark days were, are secrets known only to Milton and his God. There are no actual outcries of despair, bitterness, or self-pity. Yet it is not likely that a nature as strong and daring as his would submit to blindness without mental anguish, and in the Psalms it finds a real expression. Only the weak bow in immediate unquestioning acceptance of the yoke. The very nature of Milton's temperament eliminates the possibility of weak submission. Since, psychologically, every newly blinded adult passes through a period of mental depression, there is no reason to assume that Milton was an exception, and every reason to assume that he was not.

There had been the sacrifice of his poetic talents to the writing of controversial documents for the cause of liberty. From this sacrifice had resulted blindness, which, though chosen for patriotic reasons, had presaged no conception of its awfulness. No one, not even the blind themselves, can conceive what the loss of sight meant to Milton, who had dreamed of being a great poet of England.

With reference to the Psalms Professor Hanford says:

> Finally in 1653 on almost successive days he turned Psalms I to VIII into a variety of metrical and stanzaic forms, no two being exactly the same. One surmises that he resumed his task this time as a means of amusement and spiritual consolation in the early period of his blindness. The attempt to follow the Hebrew with minute fidelity is now abandoned; occasional touches reveal the degree to which Milton is reading his own experiences into the psalmist's cry to God out of the anguish of his soul.[1]

It is true that the soul undergoing struggle often strives to give expression to that struggle. The first eight Psalms were translated by Milton in 1653, and all but one of this number were turned into verse from August eighth to August fourteenth. Excepting the eighth, these Psalms voice the

[1] J. H. Hanford, *A Milton Handbook,* New York, 1929, p. 140.

conflict of the godly and the ungodly. To the people of the seventeenth century this struggle between the godly and the ungodly was a living matter. It very evidently concerned Milton not a little. Doubtless, he regarded himself among the godly and his enemies, the Royalists, in the camp of the ungodly. Or the Psalms may also have represented Milton's conflict with himself.

In the early days after the poet's loss of sight, I can imagine him working over the first Psalm, not with the view of setting forth the blessings of the godly but, by considering these blessings, of reassuring himself in his affliction.

> Bless'd is the man who hath not walk'd astray
> In counsel of the wicked, and i' th' way
> Of sinners hath not stood, and in the seat
> Of scorners hath not sate. But in the great
> *Jehovahs* Law is ever his delight,
> And in his Law he studies day and night.
> He shall be as a tree which planted grows
> By watry streams, and in his season knows
> To yield his fruit, and his leaf shall not fall,
> And what he takes in hand shall prosper all.
> Not so the wicked, but as chaff which fann'd
> The wind drives, so the wicked shall not stand
> In judgment, or abide their tryal then,
> Nor sinners in th' assembly of just men.
> For the Lord knows th' upright way of the just,
> And the way of bad men to ruine must.[2]

If Psalm I was translated with the purpose of gaining strength in disaster, Psalm III portrays that strength attained. If people believed, and we are told that they did believe, that Milton's blindness was a judgment sent from God, they would likewise conclude that, in his affliction, he would find little help from his Maker. But his answer comes clearly and forcefully with no apparent need for fortification. The Psalm itself indicates more eloquently than any explanation which I might offer the assurance that the poet found of God's protection and help.

> Lord how many are my foes
> How many those
> That in arms against me rise
> Many are they
> That of my life distrustfully thus say,
> No help for him in God there lies.
> But thou Lord art my shield my glory,
> Thee through my story
> Th' exalter of my head I count.

[2] Psalm I, *The Student's Milton,* p. 67.

Aloud I cry'd
Unto Jehovah, he full soon reply'd
And heard me from his holy mount
I lay and slept, I wak'd again,
For my sustain
Was the Lord. Of many millions
The populous rout
I fear not though incamping round about
They pitch against me their Pavillions.
Rise Lord, save me my God for thou
Hast smote ere now
On the cheek-bone all my foes,
Of men abhor'd
Hast broke the teeth. This help was from the Lord
They blessing on thy people flows.[3]

Marian Studley believes that, unlike any other work of Milton's, the Psalms betray the blind poet's struggle to attain to the serenity of the sonnet on his blindness. She regards Psalms III and IV as written in the same vein. Of IV Miss Studley says:

. . . he writes in Psalm IV, regarding those who doubt God's goodness in the midst of afflictions: "Talking like this world's brood." These are rebukes to men who misjudge affliction for chastisement, and do not see God's ways in the lives of men, a kind of blasphemy Milton could not be guilty of even in the difficult days of his early blindness. At the same time they are his protest that he does not wish to have his affliction judged as Eliphaz judged Job's. They are a cry for fairness and a statement of his own trust in the midst of misery.[4]

As to the psalmist, so to Milton, there is something strikingly personal in Psalm IV. Distresses had not come singly. He had lost his sight, had lost by death his wife and only son, and so he would petition God for help and strength.

Answer me when I call
God of my righteousness
In straights and in distress
Thou didst me disinthrall
And set at large; now spare,
Now pity me, and hear my earnest prai'r.[5]

Yet in distress Milton had found release, gladness, peace, and safety. The great who follow vainglory might, to Milton's mind, have suggested the Royalists.

[3] Psalm III, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
[4] M. H. Studley, "Milton and His Paraphrases of the Psalms," *Philological Quarterly*, IV (1925), 372.
[5] Psalm IV, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

If Psalm IV seems to fit Milton's case, Psalm VI may be said to be even more applicable. Here the Poet complains of spiritual weariness, of his eyes grown dark from grief, but God hears his prayer, and the poet bursts forth in exultation over the vanquishing of his enemies. Miss Studley makes the following comment with reference to verse seven:

. . . in Psalm VI, Milton thus renders the seventh verse:

> . . . mine eye
> Thro' grief consumed, is waxen old and *dark,*
> I' the midst of all mine enemies that *mark.*

Of all the versifiers of this Psalm, he alone uses the word *dark* as if to express a total want of sight. It does not seem as if mere chance would have led him to use the same word to characterize blindness in *Paradise Lost:*

> But cloud instead and ever-during dark
> Surrounds me. . .

And in *Samson Agonistes:*

> O dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,
> Irrevocable dark, total eclipse
> Without all hope of day!

It rather seems that the poet is new to his darkness, and that he intensifies the mood of the Psalmist as he would not otherwise have done. It makes Milton more human to think that he did not all at once arrive at the serenity of the "Sonnet on his Blindness."[6]

I agree with Miss Studley that Milton's use of the word "dark" was deliberate. I have elsewhere commented upon his use of the word instead of "blind." It is infinitely more poetic and, perhaps, more dramatic. I do not believe that Milton dreaded the dark, but, naturally, he suffered from the "condition" resulting from blindness.

It is significant that Milton, in this period of testing, in this new experience of blindness, should render Psalm VII into verse. In this Psalm much is said of the justice of God. Perhaps it was this belief in God's justice, in part at least, which helped Milton to find peace and content.

> Then will I Jehovah's praise
> According to his justice raise
> And sing the Name and Deitie
> Of Jehovah the most high.[7]

Psalm VIII is Milton's hallelujah to his Maker for the wonders He has bestowed. It is admirable that, after a mental struggle, the poet concludes with a song of praise. So far as he was concerned, the Psalms had accomplished their purpose, the period of depression, for the time at least, was ended; and Milton was once more master of himself.

> When I behold thy Heavens, thy Fingers art,
> The Moon and Starrs which thou so bright hast set,

[6] M. H. Studley, *op. cit.,* p. 371. [7] Psalm VII, *op. cit.,* p. 72.

In the pure firmament, then saith my heart,
O what is man that thou remembrest yet,

And think'st upon him; or of man begot
That him thou visit'st and of him art found;
Scarce to be less then Gods, thou mad'st his lot,
With honour and with state thou hast him crown'd.[8]

[8] Psalm VIII, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

CHAPTER XII

A PARADISE WITHIN

If one asserts that the Psalms, since they are not original, could not reflect the emotional experiences of the poet, this objection disappears when we turn to consider *Paradise Lost.* This poem represented for Milton the fulfillment of a lifelong dream, the realization of cherished hopes. It was, therefore, so vital that it could not fail to possess some personal elements. To some extent, *Paradise Lost* may be regarded as the mirror of Milton's past mental struggles, though I need hardly suggest that he was totally unconscious of the fact. To quote Coleridge, ". . . but John Milton himself is in every line of *Paradise Lost.*"[1] F. Le Gros Clark also comments: "Milton was not only blind, but he referred constantly to his blindness, sometimes in direct terms but more often, I think, obliquely and half consciously."[2]

I believe that Milton in *Paradise Lost* put into the mouths of Satan and his other characters the questions and answers of his own soul in the period following his loss of sight. It is impossible to study *Paradise Lost,* to look at the arguments of hope and despair, without realizing that the speeches were planned by one of whom they had once been a part. Whether or not you agree that the arguments were those of the weaker and the stronger Milton, your belief that no poem of such depth could have come entirely from the imagination of the poet, apart from experience, will give you tolerance. "The most characteristic voice of all is that of Milton as Satan, truly a double personality."[3] The man who composed *Paradise Lost* is the captain of his soul; yet the memory of the conflict of self with self is still strong within him.

If one wishes to follow out the parallel between Milton and Satan, it may be assumed that, as Beelzebub viewed the archfiend, so Milton may have regarded himself as changed by blindness.

> If thou beest he; But O how fall'n! how chang'd
> From him, who in the happy Realms of Light
> Cloth'd with transcendent brightness didst outshine
> Myriads though bright. . . .[4]

There is no doubt that blindness alters an individual mentally, spiritually, and physically. Milton, who had once gained hearings with statesmen

[1] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Milton," in his *Complete Works,* New York, 1884, VI, 312.

[2] F. Le Gros Clark, *op. cit.,* p. 112.

[3] Henry Newbolt, "A New Study of English Poetry," *English Review,* XI (1912), 386.

[4] *Paradise Lost,* Book I, ll. 84-87.

at home and abroad, was now content quietly to perform his duty within the shelter of his residence. He had lost much of his independence. There is nothing to the blind which spells dependence so much as having to be led about; and there are always occasions when such assistance is absolutely necessary. To the highly sensitive and independent spirit of Milton, this condition must have been one of the most galling. This circumstance alone would be sufficient to change Milton in outward appearance.

How many of us face the condition of inevitable and extreme alteration! The importance which we attach to the outward or physical results determines the degree of the development of the coward in us, and the extent of our defeat. For some, the end is insanity, suicide, or, what is worse, a wrecked life: but Satan, or Milton, attaching not too much importance to outward change, found the answer of the strong.

> Nor what the Potent Victor in his rage
> Can else inflict do I repent or change,
> Though chang'd in outward lustre; that fixt mind. . . .[5]

It would be both absurd and deplorable to interpret *rage* as Milton's idea of a wrathful God. The significant thought is, that neither the past calamities nor any physical change could alter *that fixt mind*. There is always the danger of reading into poetry too much of the personal experience of the poet, and yet these lines are, I believe, as Miltonic as any in *Paradise Lost*. One knows that this vigor and fixity of mind belonged to Milton as well as to Satan, a fixity which no calamity could permanently destroy.

The following quotation, if identified with Milton, must have required weeks, months, even years to gather such force of conviction. I find myself forgetting that it was Satan uttering these forceful lines:

> What though the field be lost?
> All is not lost. . . .[6]

It took even Satan a little time to reach this conclusion, yet such a conclusion is attained only by a fighter who countenances no submission to outward circumstances, but possesses the will to press onward, though everything appears as failure. To quote Montagne, ". . . the one living character in *Paradise Lost,* the character of Satan, owes much of its heroic reality to the experience of the vanquished Puritan."[7]

Surely the following lines are a direct utterance of the soul of Milton; for the remainder of his life is sufficient proof thereof:

> Since through experience of this great event
> In Arms not worse, in foresight much advanc't.[8]

[5] *Ibid.,* ll. 95-97. [6] *Ibid.,* ll. 105-11.

[7] F. C. Montagne, "Political Pamphlets by Men of Genius," *Murray's Magazine,* X (1891), 757.

[8] *Paradise Lost,* Book I, ll. 118-19.

Here we find not only reconciliation to blindness—that would have been beautiful—but added understanding which must have come only through calamity. For Milton the *great event* had been blindness. *In Arms* he was *not worse*. He had found his talent as serviceable as before the loss of sight, and his insight had by this circumstance been increased. What is the purpose of suffering and sacrifice? There is no absolute and complete answer; but whatever else it may be, it is evident that tolerance and human understanding wax strong in the heart which is master of ills.

To Milton there must have come moments of despair. It should be remembered that in calamity mental depression recurs frequently or occasionally, depending on the individual. Milton had been willing to sacrifice his sight for his country. Death would have been easier and less drawn out. Yet he could not comprehend beforehand what it would mean to be blind. Perhaps he may have regretted momentarily his sacrifice and perhaps he, like Beelzebub, may have lamented:

> Too well I see and rue the dire event,
> That with sad overthrow and foul defeat
> Hath lost us Heav'n. . . .[9]

Yet these periods of remorse, if they may be regarded as a part of Milton's experience—and I believe they may—are short-lived and transitory and are in no sense typical of the wonted fortitude of the poet.

Nothing is more difficult or more dangerous to those blinded in adult life than the resulting inactivity. We have no reason to believe that Milton furnished an exception to this experience. There are, without doubt, thoughts expressed in *Paradise Lost* and elsewhere, which were brought into existence only through the poet's actual cognizance of blindness and its resulting inaction.

> . . . the mind and spirit remains
> Invincible, and vigour soon returns,
> Though all our Glory extinct, and happy state
> Here swallow'd up in endless misery.[10]

Milton had felt the same vigor of mind and body, manacled by blindness.

> . . . with speedy words th' Arch-fiend reply'd.
> . . . to be weak is miserable
> Doing or Suffering.[11]

Suffering from what? The blind themselves would answer, suffering from inaction. These lines suggest conclusions reached by a mental struggle or struggles. Who would maintain that Milton had undergone no such conflicts? Not the sightless, nor the sighted who understand human nature, only the ignorant, or those who thoughtlessly idealize the poet, forgetting that he was human.

[9] *Ibid.*, ll. 134-36. [10] *Ibid.*, ll. 139-42. [11] *Ibid.*, ll. 156-58.

If we believe that *Paradise Lost* mirrors the poet, the following passage is one of the most significant speeches in the entire epic.

> Seest thou yon dreary Plain, forlorn and wilde,
> The seat of desolation, voyd of light,
> . . . Thither let us tend
> From off the tossing of these fiery waves,
> There rest, if any rest can harbour there,
> And reassembling our afflicted Powers,
> Consult how we may henceforth most offend
> Our Enemy, our own loss how repair,
> How overcome this dire Calamity,
> What reinforcement we may gain from Hope,
> If not what resolution from despare.[12]

There came a time in the mind of Milton when blindness was accepted, yea more, when the acceptance was preferable to the *tossing,* the mental struggle. Peace had followed resignation; in the wake of peace came the desire to use once more the *afflicted powers,* the talents, so seemingly hampered by blindness. It was necessary for Milton, as for many others, to study how best to *repair* his *loss* of vision, and overcome such a *calamity.* Then, and only then, came the *reinforcement* of hope. So Milton began to readjust himself to blindness and to resume life in the fullest.

> Is this the Region, this the Soil, the Clime,
> Said then the lost Arch Angel, this the seat
> That we must change for Heav'n, this mournful gloom
> For that celestial light? Be it so, . . .[13]

Once having accepted the condition of blindness, Milton must have surveyed his region of darkness for which he had deliberately exchanged the realms of light. After he had surrendered lost joys, he not only hailed this "Hell," but he realized that as its posessor he might alter it according to his mind.

> Hail horrours, hail
> Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell
> Receive thy new Possessor: One who brings
> A mind not to be chang'd by Place or Time.
> The mind is its own place, and in it self
> Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.
> What matter where, if I be still the same,
> And what I should be, all but less then he. . . .[14]

To Milton it was not a change of place as it was to Satan, but of condition; but be it condition or place, it matters little, the strong mind can make it heaven or hell as it chooses. Lovelace expresses this same idea in the immortal lines,

> Stone walls do not a prison make,
> Nor iron bars a cage. . . .[15]

[12] *Ibid.,* ll. 180-91. [13] *Ibid.,* ll. 242-45. [14] *Ibid.,* ll. 250-57.
[15] Richard Lovelace, "To Althea from Prison."

This control of mind over matter belongs only to the great souls. It is the only sure means of securing continued peace in calamity. If Milton's talents had been seemingly *lodg'd with him useless,* the natural course to follow after he had adjusted himself to blindness was to reassemble his mental powers.

It is interesting how quickly the archfiend, once having made a decision, leaps into action and summons his dormant forces. So, perhaps, Milton threw off the spirit of depression and swung into his wonted routine with a vigor sharpened by its disuse.

> . . . he stood and call'd
> His Legions, Angel Forms, . . .
> He call'd so loud, that all the hollow Deep
> Of Hell resounded. Princes, Potentates,
> Warriers, the Flowr of Heav'n, once yours, now lost,
> If such astonishment as this can seize
> Eternal spirits; or have ye chos'n this place
> After the toyl of Battel to repose
> Your wearied vertue, for the ease you find
> To slumber here, as in the Vales of Heav'n?
> Or in this abject posture have ye sworn
> To adore the Conquerour? who now beholds
> Cherube and Seraph rowling in the Flood
> With scatter'd Arms and Ensigns, till anon
> His swift pursuers from Heav'n Gates discern
> Th' advantage, and descending tread us down
> Thus drooping, or with linked Thunderbolts
> Transfix us to the bottom of this Gulfe.
> Awake, arise, or be for ever fall'n.[16]

In these lines I seem to feel Milton's ejectment of that stunned inaction which had resulted from his blindness. I do not mean that he sat idle during those early years: his duty as Latin secretary, the writing of the *Defences,* his domestic cares indicate anything but idleness; yet his life work doubtless seemed at a standstill. But having realized that he must make the best of blindness, he summons his knowledge, which has been stored up in memory, and with masterful self-possession forges ahead. Satan's call to his legions is, I believe, strikingly Miltonic.

As the poet becomes more absorbed in the happenings in Heaven and Hell, the temptation and fall of man, he seems so far to forget his own deprivation that the passages in *Paradise Lost* reflecting him in blindness become fewer. As the epic draws to a close, as Adam, satisfied and comforted, prepares to leave Eden, he speaks with a peace impossible for the poet to depict unless he had known that peace in his own soul. Tranquillity had come to Milton with the acceptance of blindness. It had remained through the fulfillment of his life's dream. It would linger on to cheer

[16] *Paradise Lost,* Book I, ll. 300-330.

and strengthen him in his old age. Through obedience, through love, through dependence on his Maker, through suffering for truth, comes the *summe of wisdom,* to the learning of which, for Milton, blindness had contributed not a little.

> Henceforth I learne, that to obey is best,
> And love with feare the onely God, to walk
> As in his presence, ever to observe
> His providence, and on him sole depend,
> Merciful over all his works, with good
> Still overcoming evil, and by small
> Accomplishing great things, by things deemd weak
> Subverting worldly strong, and worldly wise
> By simply meek; that suffering for Truth's sake
> Is fortitude to highest victorie,
> And to the faithful Death the Gate of Life;
> Taught this by his example whom I now
> Acknowledge my Redeemer ever blest.
>
> To whom thus also th' Angel last repli'd:
> This having learnt, thou hast attained the summe
> Of wisdom; hope no higher, . . .
> . . . onely add
> Deeds to thy knowledge answerable, add Faith,
> Add Vertue, Patience, Temperance, add Love,
> By name to come call'd Charitie, the soul
> Of all the rest: then wilt thou not be loath
> To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess
> A Paradise within thee, happier farr.[17]

[17] *Ibid.,* Book XII, ll. 561-87.

CHAPTER XIII

BREAKING THE IMAGE

There has been an ever growing tradition, during the last two centuries, that Milton is the prototype of *Samson Agonistes,* though modern scholars are begining to challenge this tradition. Corson in his volume of autobiographical passages[1] gives the drama in its entirety, which leads one to conclude that he considers all of *Samson Agonistes* to be autobiographical. Leslie Stephen confirms this idea: "*Samson Agonistes* is . . . among the most interesting . . . from the singular intensity of the scarcely concealed autobiographic utterances."[2] Verity is of the same opinion:

There are some critics for whom the personal element in *Samson Agonistes* is its great charm. That element is, at least, marked. No one can read the play without perceiving that it has something more than an artistic value. For those who are familiar with the facts of Milton's life it serves as a record of his deepest feelings at the most tragic point of his career.[3]

It is the opinion of Garnett that "Samson's impersonation of the author himself can escape no one."[4] Yet it has escaped me, though Jerram,[5] Boynton,[6] Richardson,[7] Grierson,[8] Seeley,[9] Child,[10] Reed,[11] and others find Samson the image of Milton. Visiak goes even a step further. He states that "Milton, who presents in his works an image both of himself and of his life, is openly subjective, . . . Samson being Milton: Herapha, Salmasius; and so forth; . . ."[12] Sometimes we tend to give our imaginations too much play. Though I have frequently read *Samson Agonistes,* the idea of Herapha being comparable to Salmasius came to me as considerable of a surprise.

[1] Hiram Corson, *op. cit.*

[2] Leslie Stephen, "Milton," in *Dictionary of National Biography,* New York, 1894, XXXVIII, 36.

[3] A. W. Verity, "Introduction," John Milton, in *Samson Agonistes,* Cambridge, 1922, p. 58.

[4] Richard Garnett, *Life of John Milton,* London, 1890, p. 184.

[5] Charles Jerram, "Introduction," in John Milton, *Samson Agonistes,* London, 1888, p. 30.

[6] Percy Boynton, "Milton's London," *The Chautauquan,* LX (Sept.-Nov., 1910), 378.

[7] Mrs. A. S. Richardson, "On John Milton," in *Familiar Talks on English Literature,* Chicago, 1892, p. 199.

[8] H. J. C. Grierson, "Milton," in *The First Half of the Seventeenth Century,* Edinburgh, 1906, VII, 199.

[9] John Seeley, "Milton's Poetry," *Macmillan's Magazine,* XIX (1869), 194.

[10] Harold Child, "The Literature of the English Restoration, including Milton," *Cambridge Modern History,* Cambridge, 1908, V, 123.

[11] Henry Reed, "Milton," *Lectures on the British Poets,* Philadelphia, 1857, I, 231.

[12] E. H. Visiak, *op. cit.,* p. 22.

But let us consider first the selection of the subject, concerning which Keightley says:

As it is probable that the mind of Milton could not remain in a state of inaction, we may suppose that it reverted to its former idea of composing dramas in the Greek manner, on sacred subjects; and that of Samson, though not included in the list which he had drawn up, may, from the resemblance of the fortunes of that hero to his own, have led to his giving it the preference to any of the fine subjects contained in that list, formed ere the clouds of misfortune had descended on his head.[13]

It might produce a dramatic effect to conclude that Milton chose Samson because of the similarity of their afflictions. But Keightley has erred in his statement that the subject was not included in the list which Milton had drawn up. In the Cambridge Manuscript we find the following subjects dealing with Samson:

"*Samson Pursophorus* or *Hybristes,* or *Samson Marrying,* or *Ramath-Lechi*: Judg. xv."

"*Dagonalia*: Judg. xvi."[14]

It is evident that at least the subject of Samson had been considered. True, *Samson Agonistes* is not specifically mentioned. But since Samson is mentioned, it seems to me unwise to assume that blindness alone determined the choice. If there is any truth in the claim which Ellwood[15] makes, that he suggested *Paradise Regained,* there would be equal reason for concluding that it, also, found its existence through blindness. No one has ever contended that the choice of *Paradise Regained* for a subject grew out of blindness, though that would be just as logical. As I see it, the only reason offered by scholars for Milton's choice of the story of Samson as a theme is that he, too, was blind. This view is as ridiculous as Warburton's claim that Milton chose Samson to "satirize bad wives." "It should seem," says Peck, "our author made choice of this subject, because Samson was blind, as he himself was."[16] This is, however, not a sound basis; there may have been other determining factors, all too easily overlooked by the scholar who wants to paint a romantic picture. I admit that blindness may have influenced Milton's choice, though I think we are prone to attribute too much importance to that detail. This inclination to classify people and things by one like trait, arbitrarily chosen for the purpose, reminds me of an incident of my childhood. When I was about five years old, a kind farmer presented me with a downy, blind chicken, which he confidently as-

[13] Thomas Keightley, *An Account of the Life, Opinions, and Writings of John Milton,* London, 1855, p. 322.

[14] *Facsimile of the Manuscript of Milton's Minor Poems Preserved in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge,* edited by W. A. Wright, Cambridge, 1899, p. 34.

[15] Thomas Ellwood, *The History of the Life of Thomas Ellwood,* London, 1791, p. 121.

[16] Francis Peck, *New Memoirs of the Life and Poetical Works of Mr. Milton,* London, 1740, p. 85.

sumed I would like since I, too, could not see. Of course, I did like it, though I should have liked any other little chicken as much.

Milton may have selected Samson as the hero of his play because the plot could readily be made to conform with the rules of Greek drama, or he may have chosen him because he possessed all the attributes of a hero of Greek tragedy; he may have chosen him because Samson was famous in Biblical history, and a familiar character to the seventeenth century, or because he illustrated in his life the peculiar sin of disobedience, which Adam had committed, and which

Brought Death into the World and all our woe;

or for other less obvious reasons permitted to any creative author. If it be insisted that Milton's blindness did influence his choice of subject, it seems to me that the time of the writing of *Samson Agonistes* is something of a determining factor.

There is no external evidence to establish the actual date of composition, though critics commonly place it between 1667 and 1670. There was no occurrence in this period of such a disturbing nature as to cause Milton unconsciously to express his own thoughts through Samson. The Reverend A. J. Church,[17] however, is of the opinion that it was written between 1662 and 1665. If the drama were composed early in the Restoration, there is more chance of its being autobiographical. The horror of capture and possible death was then still fresh in the poet's mind. It might, therefore, be argued by some that Milton unconsciously put into the mouth of Samson some of his own bitter complaints against blindness; I do not think, however, that it would have been possible for the poet to speak unconsciously through Samson, since both suffered the same handicap and since, by the condemnation of his enemies, he was kept ever aware of his affliction. Neither do I believe that Milton consciously voiced his own feelings in the drama, no matter what the date, unless, perhaps, they are echoed by the chorus or others. He would most certainly know that every expression referring to blindness would be construed as personal, and, if it were so construed, it would spell victory for his opponents, and defeat, poverty, misery, and neglect for him. He would have been mentally blind as well as physically to have afforded such boundless satisfaction to those who would most delight in his downfall.

Yet in the face of such conditions scholars maintain that *Samson Agonistes* is autobiographical. Take, for example, this passage from Bailey:

Into this strange drama so alien from all the literature of his day, Milton has poured all the thoughts and emotions with which the spectacle of his own life filled him. . . . And he himself, who had as he thought so signally borne his witness for God, sits blind and sad in his lonely house, "to

[17] John Downing, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

visitants a gaze Or pitied object" with no hope left of high service to his country and no prospect but that of a "contemptible old age obscure."[18]

If scholars are inclined to read fallacious conditions into situations, there is nothing to prevent them from so doing. It is however, generally believed that Milton did not live in poverty, that instead of obscurity he received frequent visits from men of note, and that his latter years must have been happy, in view of the service he had rendered to his country and the accomplishment of his life's dream. And yet Rosedale has even worse imaginings than Bailey. He says:

The last poetical work which Milton has left us is *Samson Agonistes*. We can almost see Milton composing the work which tells his life's story. We picture the old man, who knows his Bible almost by heart, listening to the passage being read to him one day, when, suddenly, there flashes upon him the similarity between the Hebrew champion Samson and himself. Strong beyond the men of his day; successful and praised; triumphant over his foes and dreaded by them; betrayed by a woman, and crushed in consequence; deprived of his sight; despised by his enemies, and neglected by his former associates; in old age poor and sad, yet strong and eager for the work of fighting for what he conceives to be national righteousness, and willing to die in the effort to promote the freedom of his country; all this, characteristic of Samson, he feels true of himself. How may he better give this his testament to the world than by writing a tragedy, in which he is the real hero, based on the story of Samson?[19]

There is no question that there are similarities between Milton and Samson. There would be some similarities between any two sightless people, and Milton's experiences paralleled in a number of ways those of the Hebrew champion. Wolff depicts these similarities:

And indeed, in delineating the greater part of Samson's fate and sentiments, he had only to describe his own, his blindness, his proscription, his poverty, his defiance, his loftiness of soul, his conscious power from the vastness of his own intellect, and the firmness of his principles.[20]

Certainly he could not have been unconscious of these parallels, but that very fact would be conducive to caution.

Rosedale pictures Milton as deserted by his old associates; yet I do not know to whom he refers. Milton had never been exceedingly popular, but the friends worth retaining certainly had not deserted him. We know that Henry Marvell, a member of Parliament, continued his visits to Milton throughout the first decade of the Restoration, when public business permitted him, and that he only remained away from Milton during his own

[18] John Bailey, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

[19] H. G. Rosedale, "Milton, His Religion and Polemics," *Milton Memorial Lectures* for 1908, Oxford, 1909, p. 159.

[20] H. T. Wolff, *On Milton's Samson Agonistes both as a Drama and an Illustration of the Poet's Life*, Goettingen, 1871, p. 25.

controversy with Samuel Parker, and then simply in order that the poet might not be blamed for the writing of pamphlets for which Milton was not responsible. We know also that Milton received visits from Viscountess Ranelagh until her departure from England, and that through correspondence he kept in touch with Richard Jones, her nephew and his former pupil, and Henry Oldenburg. Milton was also visited frequently by his attending physician, Dr. Paget. Of course, some of his old associates may have ceased to call upon the poet in blindness, but such former associates would hardly be worthy of his friendship and would therefore be little missed by him. Milton must have added to his list of acquaintances and friends through the need of amanuenses. Friendship between Ellwood and Milton was brought about in this way. Dryden too visited the poet. There is a feeling among scholars that even Charles II viewed with favor this indomitable spirit.

Why any scholar should picture Milton as poor is incomprehensible. He died leaving a will which was of sufficient value to be contested by his daughters. In support of this Symmons says:

But the moderation of . . . his wants at Jewin Street still kept him at a distance from poverty, and they who could suppose him to be unhappy, must have been ill acquainted with the consolation of conscious rectitude, or with the exquisite gratification to be enjoyed by a mind affluent with knowledge and by an imagination which could range without control through the spacious walks of the universe.[21]

His sadness might have been increased by the failure of the cause for which he had sacrificed his sight, yet he must have been conscious that that cause had been distorted by those to whom it had been intrusted. His blindness, likewise, had now become so habitual that it could not have been a constant cross, for even the greatest afflictions lose their severity with time.

The following quotation from Keightley pictures Milton in old age much as I see him:

Thus calmly, thus gently, quietly, and unostentatiously glided away the closing days in the life of a man who possessed a secret consciousness that he had well performed the part assigned him on earth; had well employed the talents committed to him; had achieved a name among the most illustrious of the sons of men, which was to last perhaps coevally with the world itself. All these cheering thoughts and anticipations were illumed and gilded by the light that beamed on his inward sense from the future world, in which he was to enjoy the fulness of bliss. Surely such a man could not have been unhappy, however narrow his circumstances, however undutiful his children, however disappointed his religious and political aspirations. Nor should be omitted in enumerating the blessings bestowed on this illustrious man, his total exemption at all periods of his life from

[21] Charles Symmons, *op. cit.*, p. 509.

the miseries of a dependence on and solicitation of courts and ministers and the worldly great.[22]

Collins, in support of the autobiographical idea, says, "That Milton is himself speaking in such passages as the lines in which Samson soliloquises on his blindness . . . must be obvious to every one."[23] The soliloquy is, I believe, not a picture which Milton would wish to give of himself, since it is void of Miltonic faith and pride:

> O loss of sight, of thee I most complain!
> Blind among enemies, O worse then chains,
> Dungeon, or beggery, or decrepit age!
> Light the prime work of God to me is extinct,
> And all her various objects of delight
> Annull'd, which might in part my grief have eas'd,
> Inferiour to the vilest now become
> Of man or worm; the vilest here excel me
> They creep, yet see, I dark in light expos'd
> To daily fraud, contempt, abuse and wrong,
> Within doors, or without, still as a fool,
> In power of others, never in my own;
> Scarce half I seem to live, dead more then half,
> O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,
> Irrecoverably dark, total Eclipse
> Without all hope of day![24]

Even in the early period, when blindness to Milton was a new and awful experience, we find no such complaints and wailings; but if you argue that this lament may have issued unconsciously from the soul of the poet, I answer again that I do not see how Milton could have so spoken and remained obtuse to the implication. This wail, if considered autobiographical by his enemies, would have been a source of fiendish satisfaction to them. Such satisfaction Milton would never willingly have afforded. He was ever mindful of his enemies. Consciously or unconsciously expressed, the plaint remains utterly out of keeping with the spirit evinced by Milton in his other works.

If you consider the speeches of Samson as autobiographical, you must also scrutinize the repellent picture painted by the chorus:

> This, this is he; softly a while,
> Let us not break in upon him;
> O change beyond report, thought, or belief!
> See how he lies at random, carelessly diffus'd,
> With languish't head unpropt,
> As one past hope, abandon'd,

[22] Thomas Keightley, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

[23] John Collins, "Introduction," in John Milton, *Samson Agonistes*, Oxford, 1915, p. 8.

[24] John Milton, *Samson Agonistes*, in *The Student's Milton*, ll. 67-82.

And by himself given over;
In slavish habit, ill-fitted weeds
O're worn and soild;[25]

Note the phrases descriptive of Samson's appearance: "carelessly diffus'd," "with languish'd head unpropt," "as one past hope, abandon'd," "ill-fitted weeds o're worn and soild." This picture could hardly be said to portray Milton, but if you object that I am taking the passage too literally, let us consider other lines to determine how absurd the autobiographical concept is.

Nothing of all these evils hath befall'n me
But justly; I my self have brought them on,
Sole Author I, sole cause: . . .[26]

There is certainly nothing suggestive of Milton's attitude in the preceding passage. Nor do the following lines correspond to our idea of the poet:

. . . to God have brought
Dishonour, obloquie, and op't the mouths
Of Idolists, and Atheists; have brought scandal
To Israel, diffidence of God, and doubt
In feeble hearts, propense anough before
To waver, or fall off and joyn with Idols:
Which is my chief affliction, shame and sorrow,
The anguish of my Soul, that suffers not
Mine eie to harbour sleep, or thoughts to rest.[27]

Again, I can not discover anything suggestive of Milton's conduct in the following passage of self-condemnation, abasement, and degradation:

. . . let me here,
As I deserve, pay on my punishment;
And expiate, if possible, my crime,
Shameful garrulity. To have reveal'd
Secrets of men, the secrets of a friend,
How hainous had the fact been, how deserving
Contempt, and scorn of all, to be excluded
All friendship, and avoided as a blab,
The mark of fool set on his front?[28]

Neither could any parallelism be found in the following:

Now blind, disheartn'd, sham'd, dishonour'd, quell'd,
To what can I be useful, wherein serve
My Nation, and the work from Heav'n imposed,
But to sit idle on the household hearth,
A burdenous drone; to visitants a gaze,
Or pitied object, . . .[29]

[25] *Ibid.*, ll. 115-23. [26] *Ibid.*, ll. 374-76. [27] *Ibid.*, ll. 451-59.
[28] *Ibid.*, ll. 489-96. [29] *Ibid.*, ll. 563-68.

Blind Milton certainly was, disheartened he may at times have been, shamed or dishonoured he could scarcely be in view of his pride and faith in his concept of right, quelled he never was, he who less than a month before the Restoration sent to General Monk *The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth,* who in 1673 published *Of True Religion.* His spirit was as indomitable at his death as it was when, in 1640, he began his warfare of tracts. So I might go on selecting quotations that can not be considered as autobiographical. Yet it is surprising how few scholars have considered Samson in any other light.

Just how few had not accepted *Samson Agonistes* as autobiographical was demonstrated to me in my almost fruitless search for an opinion to support my own. It would seem, however, that scholars of today agree with me. And here I quote Professor Hanford, who is always sane in his criticism.

> Let us recognize at once that *Samson Agonistes* is a work of art and not a disguised autobiography. In the representation of Samson, Milton has undoubtedly put more of himself than in any other of his imaginative creations. The sense of power and dignity, the "plain heroic magnitude of mind," the will toward championship are Milton. So too is the noble self-pity, expressed in the consciousness of deprivation in the loss of sight ("The sun to me is dark, and silent as the moon"), and the feeling of physical helplessness ("In powers of others, never in my own"). But all this is heightened and idealized for purposes of art. The tragic gloom and despair of Samson, the wretchedness of pain, the distaste of life, are the embodiments of an aesthetic mood which owes quite as much to literature as to personal experience. As a matter of fact the impression left by such autobiographical records as we have of Milton in old age is quite the reverse of this, suggesting the persistence in him to the end of a temper unspoiled by tribulation.[30]

Though Milton may have chosen Samson because of his blindness, though there are without doubt parallels in the two characters, there is little to support the belief that the drama is autobiographical. Professor Hanford's view lays open the question: Was *Samson Agonistes* a mirror of Milton? My answer is yes, though perhaps less unconsciously and more guardedly than in *Paradise Lost.* It must be granted that a writer visiting Rome, on his return will put into his work some of the atmosphere derived from that visit; so, Milton in blindness gave to Samson his understanding, his sympathy, his knowledge of the misery of other less fortunate sightless people. He could not have helped being aware of or commiserative with the thousands of blind forced by circumstances less favorable than his own to beg in the streets for their bread. He took a story whose facts had already carefully been set down in Scripture; he arranged the material to coincide with the rules of Greek drama; and then, for purposes of art,

[30] J. H. Hanford, *Studies in Shakespeare, Milton, and Donne,* New York, 1925, p. 178.

he depicted the misery, the helplessness, and the tragic contrast in Samson's condition, as only a man in sympathy with such conditions could.

Instead of being autobiographical, it seems to me rather that the speeches of Samson are what Milton's enemies, basing their knowledge upon the miserable blind, might say of the poet. The lines of the Chorus are sometimes more suggestive of Milton than those of Samson:

> Oh how comely it is and how reviving
> To the Spirits of just men long opprest!
> When God into the hands of thir deliverer
> Puts invincible might
> To quell the mighty of the Earth, th' oppressour,
> The brute and boist'rous force of violent men
> Hardy and industrious to support
> Tyrannic power, but raging to pursue
> The righteous and all such as honour Truth;[31]

Or take these lines from the Chorus:

> The rarer thy example stands,
> By how much from the top of wondrous glory,
> Strongest of mortal men,
> To lowest pitch of abject fortune thou art fall'n.[32]

How in accord with Milton's faith is this passage also from the Chorus:

> Just are the ways of God,
> And justifiable to Men;
> Unless there be who think not God at all,
> If any be, they walk obscure;
> For of such Doctrine never was there School,
> But the heart of the Fool,
> And no man therein Doctor but himself.[33]

It is as if Milton in answer to Samson's dejection and misery lends to the Chorus his own fortitude, faith, standards of right, and belief in the justice of God. If *Samson Agonistes,* therefore, is autobiographical, it is autobiographical only through the Chorus. Here we see Milton not defeated though blind, glorying in his affliction rather than complaining of it, and carrying on ceaselessly and in steadfast faith the work that he believed was his.

In view of the foregoing I conclude that, though blindness may have influenced Milton's choice of subject, and though there are parallelisms between Samson and Milton, nevertheless *Samson Agonistes* is not autobiographical.

[31] *Samson Agonistes,* ll. 1268-76.
[32] *Ibid.,* ll. 166-69.
[33] *Ibid.,* ll. 293-99.

PART FOUR
MILTON'S EYES TAKE HOLIDAY

CHAPTER XIV

THE ECLIPSE

Irrecoverably dark, total Eclipse

As our Pilgrim Fathers entered a new world, so John Milton entered a new realm. Both journeys were taken for the cause of liberty; but from the world into which Milton passed, there was no returning. It was the world of the blind.

Milton's eyesight had begun to fail when he was about thirty-three years old, he related in the letter to Philaras. He lost his sight first in his left eye and then in the right, so that by March or April of 1652, he was totally blind, according to Masson's computation.[1] This blindness was hastened by the writing of the *Defence of the English People* in answer to Salmasius' *Defence of the Royal Cause.*

It is essential that we of a later century try to appreciate Milton's point of view. The poet had always allowed his political and religious beliefs to hold first place and so, when the order from the Council came, asking him to answer Salmasius' book, which was doing the Commonwealth so much harm abroad, he placed the writing of the *First Defence* as his prime duty. Gladly, therefore, he entered the arena of controversy, to come out of it victorious though blind. That the Commonwealth grew in importance in the minds of the foreign powers is a matter of history. How much the writing of the *First Defence* had to do with England's growing popularity abroad during that period can not be fully estimated. That the book had considerable influence is without question. Whether its influence caused Salmasius to leave the Swedish court has not been ascertained. Since opprobrium appears to have been the most popular means of response in those days, it seems wise to stress the effect which the work produced and the sacrifice which is represented. "Never was patriotism more self-sacrificing than Milton's," said Osgood,[2] and he might have added, "and never was sacrifice more costly."

Perhaps Professor Trent's appraisal of Milton's action is the most glowing:

I know of no more splendid example of this [unspectacular and patriotic self-sacrifice] than Milton's calm determination to finish at the cost of his sight the reply to Salmasius that the Council had requested him to compose. . . . The point is that a poet conscious of great powers and of a long-cherished purpose to create an enduring monument of his art which should vie with any bequeathed by antiquity and reflect luster upon himself and his

[1] David Masson, *op. cit.,* IV, 427.

[2] S. Osgood, "Milton in Our Day," *Christian Examiner,* LVII (1854), 323.

people, should have quietly put from him the thought that by declining the task proposed he might preserve the remnants of the most precious and priceless of his senses, the sense that to the true scholar and poet seems almost synonymous with life itself, and should have calmly undertaken what he conceived to be his duty.[3]

The average person considers the loss of sight as the greatest calamity that can befall an individual. Fortunately for me I have always found difficulty in believing that this is true. I know of no blind person who would prefer deafness to his own handicap. The late Lord Leicester, who was both blind and deaf in advanced age, is said to have found blindness the lesser of the two difficulties. Yet, as Professor Trent says, eyesight "seems almost synonymous with life itself" and this is certainly the commonly accepted view. I have sometimes asked myself if my attitude toward blindness might cause me to regard Milton's sacrifice with less appreciation than it deserves. On the other hand, I have wondered if my attitude with reference to it is not, because of similar conditions, rendered more sane.

It is not possible to describe Milton's experiences, sensations, and thoughts while he was going blind, for he himself has left no account of them. He tells us merely that when in the morning he tried to read, his eyes became heavy and he experienced considerable difficulty in reading. We can, however, by studying the accounts of others who have lost their sight, approximate to some degree the nature of his reactions. As in the cases of those whose experiences have been reported there must have come to Milton a time when black print appeared gray and the printed page became one indistinct blur. This would have been late in the period, when he was writing the *First Defence*. How much of it had to be dictated, how much of the book he was answering had to be read to him will never be known.

Masson imagined that

The new house in Petty France, into which Milton had entered in December, 1651, had within a few months from that date all but ceased, both within and without, to be anything distinct to his vision. We have to imagine that now and henceforth he had to be led along its rooms and passages and into its garden, that the whole green neighborhood had become a vague blank or blur to him, and that, whenever he did venture across the Park towards Whitehall, it had to be under guidance.[4]

Doubtless Masson's inferences that Milton would have to be led about in a new house are correct, but after he had become familiar with his surroundings, such assistance would no longer have been necessary. Though many blind people go about the streets alone, I do not believe that Milton ever traveled abroad unaccompanied after the loss of his sight. The older an individual is when he becomes blind, the harder is the adjustment to

[3] W. P. Trent, *Longfellow and Other Essays*, New York, 1910, p. 132.
[4] David Masson, *op. cit.*, IV, 428.

the new condition. Milton was forty-three when he became totally blind, an age which could not be conducive to independence. Christopher Milton testified that the poet's daughters were careless of him and "made nothing of deserting him."[5] Such desertion would hardly have been a cause for complaint in Milton's own house or garden, surroundings with which he would have been familiar. They must have left him stranded in the fields or streets of London. This circumstance in itself strengthens my belief that Milton did not go out unaccompanied.

But to return to the discussion of Milton's failing vision. Perhaps Booth Tarkington's case is as near a parallel as we shall find. His symptoms somewhat resemble those depicted by the poet in the letter to Philaras. Tarkington's account of the gradual approach of his blindness is as follows:

> I rather slowly began to be aware that distances were becoming vague to my right eye. . . . The specialist I consulted said, "You've got a haze in that eye. . . ."[6]
>
> One day I noticed that it (the haze) had become so deep that with my left eye covered I couldn't see the pattern of the rug on which I stood. "Why that right eye's practically blind," I thought. "How queer it would be not to be able to see the pattern of the rug even with my other eye! It would be—almost blindness."
>
> I had, in fact, an uncomfortable moment, wondering if a "haze" might not some day come into my left eye too. But this rather shivery thought came and passed, as its like must have come and passed for so many thousands of people since our world began, and I reassured myself with the feeling that so far at least I was "all right." Two good eyes were really superfluous; one was enough—and so it was, and is indeed.
>
> The time did come—fortunately, taking its leisure and waiting several years, but nevertheless arriving—when the "haze" became perceptible—in that other eye, too. Distances grew vague and vaguer; long roads did not reach the horizon but disappeared halfway in a fog that wasn't there; people on the street were ghosts until they came within a few feet of me—then in a little while, still remained ghosts when they came that near. Lights became wreaths of sparks; the fog moved up from the distance, enveloping what was nearest and eliminating distance entirely, and in the dark, whether I shut my eyes or not, I was entertained by elaborate displays of fireworks and incessant dances of luminous mites. In the day-time the word "cataract" seemed appropriate; ceaseless energetic motion was ever before me—endless descents of gray, sometimes varied with pastel colors and unbelievably rapid.
>
> By this time I had difficulty in moving about a room, distinguishing the food upon my plate, and getting into my clothes, and couldn't be trusted with matches at all—a deprivation sometimes more acute than might be suspected.[7]

[5] Henry Todd, *Some Account of the Life and Writings of John Milton,* London, 1809, p. 175.

[6] Booth Tarkington, *op. cit.,* p. 49. [7] *Ibid.,* p. 111.

Recently a friend told me that he had heard that blind people do not enjoy the gratification of a cigar or a cigarette. This belief, although it probably arises from the fact that the sighted find some of their pleasure in watching the wreaths of smoke, is untrue. Many blind people smoke and find considerable satisfaction in so doing. With very little practice, they are able to light their own cigars or cigarettes. No doubt both Milton and Booth Tarkington learned to do this quite readily. I know of no blind person who has this done for him.

We may imagine that Milton, trying to seek out a familiar haunt where he might experience his old freedom of motion and gain the much needed and much missed exercise, felt somewhat as Tarkington did:

Walking outdoors, even with a companion who held my arm, had become a little bothersome—slight inequalities of ground offer somewhat more jarring surprises to those who don't see them than might be guessed—but on the shore of a small Maine harbor a friend and I had a boathouse together, and from it a long pier straggled forth into the water. The planking of this pier was ancient but level and rails protected the sides, and there I could walk in the open air as comfortably as if I saw perfectly. . . . Here, indeed, as in other surroundings that were familiar, I was usually almost unaware of my littleness of vision.[8]

Milton's selection of a house with a garden must have been due, in part at least, to his desire for freedom of movement. Here he could walk briskly and unaccompanied, indulge in exercises, or sit and reflect in the sunshine, whenever the climate made this possible.

Tarkington's consciousness of his approaching blindness must have had further similarity to Milton's:

I could still see a little through the fog; enough in bright daylight to discern the general contour of a room and its furniture; could say how many fingers of a hand held near me were extended.[9] . . . Failing vision, like the softening tint of age upon a painting, had put a harmonizing tone over many things not beautiful to clear eyes.[10]

Gordon Lathrop, blind at thirty-five, also helps us to understand the experiences that Milton probably underwent. He writes of himself:

My universe is not pitch-black. It is pearl-gray. I recognize trees and barn doors, but not until I run into them. . . . No philosophy I could bring to bear on my case could console me for my loss of physical freedom. It was not the eyesight loss, but the effects of it, if you follow me. The necessity of staying put, of forever depending on the arm of a friend or employees should I venture out. I was too old to learn successfully to walk alone, tap-tapping with a cane. . . . Gradually I began to feel the precious thought of humanity towards the blinded. I began to like humankind better and humankind responded by reaching out hands on every side. To a considerable degree, the doors of my cage were opened.[11]

[8] *Ibid.* [9] *Ibid.* [10] *Ibid.*

[11] Gordon Lathrop, "I See with My Ears," *Atlantic Monthly,* CXLVIII (July, 1931), 13.

Milton, too, must have felt the hampering of blindness. What came to compensate him for his loss he has not told us. Perhaps it was his baby Deborah, toddling about and prattling to him, or the meeting with Catherine Woodcock, who later became his second wife, or perchance it was the understanding of some friend or friends. But whatever his sensations, difficulties, and compensations, there is no reason to doubt that he was totally blind by 1652.

There is every reason to suppose that after his loss of sight Milton resumed a fairly normal mode of living and that this resumption was due largely to his own determination. His first wife had died in 1652 and for the next four years he must have been surrounded only by his small children and servants, so that he was forced to draw upon his own resources.

For Milton, as for any blinded adult, it is, after all, the doing of the little, routine things of the day which helps to restore the feeling of normality. Of the St. Dunstaner, Sir Arthur Pearson relates:

Now when for the first time he held in his hand a watch by which he could tell the hour, he was delighted, and he was still more delighted to find that he was able to do something like other people which his blindness had seemed to prevent. It was a little discovery that, like a spark, set alight all kinds of hopes. He took an extraordinary pleasure in letting his fingers succeed in this way where before he had only trusted his eyes.[12]

Other requisites for normality in blindness are the ability to laugh, even at one's own blunders, and the retention of normal phraseology and of mental pictures. Perhaps the ability to laugh at his mistakes would be the most difficult for Milton to learn, since he was unusually sensitive. As to the retention of mental images, Milton was a past master in the art, for it was from memory and imagination that he drew the pictures of the things he described in *Paradise Lost.*

Sir Arthur Pearson observes:

The most annoying paradox in the world of the blind lies in the fact that the better the social position of a man who loses his sight and the higher his intellectual attainments, the more difficult it is for him to re-establish himself, or to start business or professional life on a new basis.[13]

Education does not decrease the amount of skepticism that the average person feels towards the blind. Andrew Marvell, than whom Milton had no better friend, was no exception to this far too common tendency. He confesses his doubt of Milton's capability in a poem prefixed to *Paradise Lost*:

> When I beheld the Poet blind, yet bold,
> In slender Book his vast Design unfold,
> . . . the Argument
> Held me a while misdoubting his Intent,
> That he would ruine (for I saw him strong)
> The sacred Truths to Fable and old Song

[12] Sir Arthur Pearson, *op. cit.*, p. 58. [13] *Ibid.*, p. 228.

(So *Sampson* groap'd the Temples Posts in spight)
The World o'rewhelming to revenge his sight.[14]

There is also among the sighted the idea that blindness is synonymous with the inability to think. Sir Arthur Pearson is of the opinion that from blindness unquestionably improved mentality results. When blindness comes, practically every action of life

demands thought, and closely concentrated thought at that. This continued mental exercise, this necessity for making the very most of all indications which help one to be normal, has unquestionably a stimulating beneficial effect upon the brain, while the increased necessity for exercising the memory tends to greatly improve that most valuable faculty.[15]

Perhaps this is why Milton believed that his inner perception had been increased by his loss of sight. It may seem preposterous to modern scholars that anyone should have questioned Milton's mentality, yet that is exactly what Count Bundt did when he complained of the delay in framing the treaty with Sweden, in May, 1656. To quote Whitelocke:

The Swedes Ambassador again complained of the delays in his business, and that when he had desired to have the Articles of this Treaty put into Latine, according to the custom in Treaties, that it was 14 dayes they made him stay for that Translation; and sent it to one Mr. Milton, a blind man, to put them into Latine; who he said must use an Amanuensis to read it to him, and that Amanuensis might publish the matter of the Articles as he pleases; and that it seemed strange to him there should be none but a blind man capable of putting a few Articles into Latine. That the Chancellor with his own hand penned the Articles made at Upsall, and so he heard the Ambassador Whitelocke did for those on his part. The Imployment of Mr. Milton was excused to him, because several other Servants of the Council fit for that Imployment were then absent.[16]

It would seem rather that Milton was best fitted to put the treaty into Latin. Why the Ambassador was kept waiting fourteen days for the translation is not known. I am of the opinion that had the delay been due to the need of an amanuensis the Council would have supplied the same. The delay may have been caused by illness or some like unavoidable deterrent.

Another common misconception is that because a person can not see, he can not walk without support, and that he has unusual difficulties going up and down stairs. Walford confirms this idea when he pictures the "staircase of roughhewn oak up which Milton in his blindness was led to bed."[17] Since Milton was doubtless as independent as any blind person, only his gout or unfamiliarity with his surroundings would make such assistance

[14] Andrew Marvell, "On Paradise Lost," in *Student's Milton,* p. 158, ll. 1-10.

[15] Sir Arthur Pearson, *op. cit.,* p. 289.

[16] Bulstrode Whitelocke, "May, 1656," in *Memorials of the English Affairs,* London, 1682, p. 633.

[17] Edward Walford, "With John Milton at Chalfont St. Giles," *The Antiquarian Magazine,* VIII (1885), 116.

necessary. To the sightless, steps offer no more difficulty than they offer to the sighted.

Blindness inevitably brings certain disadvantages and difficulties, each of which is small in itself, and yet they have considerable influence upon the life of the individual. That these disadvantages were experienced by Milton is beyond question. Among these difficulties the inability to read emotions on the faces of others is not least. It may be compensated in the case of some by the inflection of the voice or the touch of the hand. A writer in *The Literary Magazine* gives free play to his imagination when he pictures Milton as

> blind, decrepit, poor and solitary, for solitary he must then have been, amidst those who surround him, seated by a little fire in his kitchen, crying to his wife with a voice of patient grief, "Make much of me as long as I live."[18]

If there were any foundation for these imaginings, I would interpret them as meaning, not that Milton was solitary, but that he was trying to secure for himself in the language of the blind the assurance of tenderness which the eye was no longer able to report. There are some individuals whose emotional reactions I have been unable to translate in any way, though such individuals are rare.

Since blindness must be endured in spite of its difficulties, the only course open is to make the most of it, as Milton did. Mannix points out:

> Blindness is primarily a physical deprivation, and as such may be regarded simply as an obstacle to be overcome, as a stimulus to effort. But the loss of sight more than any other affliction is a test of the temper and mettle of a man, of his will to live and do, of his faith and hope in the future. It is in the kingdom of the blind that the triumph of men's highest nature and powers over adversity and despair is most strikingly and heroically manifested.[19]

Huskinson, a psychologist, who had observed the blinded soldiers of St. Dunstan, concludes, "Contrary to general belief, I have discovered that very few psychological changes take place in the blinded man owing to his blindness."[20] The number of psychological changes taking place depends after all on how normal in abnormality is the conduct of the newly blinded person. The greater the normality, the greater is the resulting happiness. Huskinson further observes, "Blindness seems to have given them the genius to comprehend the essentials of human happiness which it is given to but few sighted people to perceive."[21] If any individual losing his sight in adult life ever learned the essentials of human happiness, it was Milton. Who can say that blindness did not contribute much to learning this lesson?

[18] "Milton's Domestic Life," *The Literary Magazine,* V (1806), 52.
[19] John Mannix, *Heroes of the Darkness,* London, 1911, p. 9.
[20] Sir Arthur Pearson, *op. cit.,* p. 311.
[21] *Ibid.,* p. 315.

CHAPTER XV

HE DID NOT STAND AND WAIT

"However brave and self-reliant our blind men and women," Helen Keller says, "could the utmost dreams of education for the sightless be realized, the dark is still the dark and blindness an irremediable calamity."[1] No one knows more than the blind themselves how irremediable is the loss of sight. Yet every blind person in greater or less degree answers the challenge as Milton certainly answered it, when he carried on with little interruption the numerous activities which had been laid upon him by the Council. Though he had said, "They also serve who only stand and wait," no one in blindness has given the world more active, more positive service than Milton. It should be remembered that, though he was not totally blind until the age of forty-three, he wrote a far greater amount both of poetry and prose after his loss of sight than before. How much his handicap aided in this increased productivity can not be ascertained.

Let us consider briefly the extent of Milton's activities. We know that he held the office of Secretary of Foreign Tongues for eleven years,[2] from 1649 to 1660, at least eight of which were in total darkness. It is true that the Council furnished him with various assistants, among them Weckherlin, Thurloe, Marvell, Meadows, and Jessop.[3] This assistance was made necessary partly because of Milton's blindness, but partly probably, because of the increased correspondence of the Commonwealth and Protectorate, which accompanied their growing importance in world affairs.

It might be argued that Milton was retained as secretary because of his previous services to the state and his tremendous sacrifice. But all the evidence points to the fact that, though blind, he continued indispensable to his government. Masson concludes, in reference to his usefulness, "It cannot be by mere accident that, when Cromwell wanted letters written in the highest strain of his most characteristic passion, they should always have been supplied by Milton."[4] It is true that the Swedish ambassador, Bundt, complained of the delay in the translation of the treaty with Sweden. But from Masson we learn that Bundt's complaints had no effect, and that Milton wrote in the month following a larger number of official state letters than in any similar period since the beginning of his secretaryship, with the exception of May, 1655, when he wrote the Piedmont letters.[5]

During the early period of his blindness Milton wrote the *Second Defence*

[1] *Proceedings of the 1929 Annual Conference of the National Society for the Prevention of Blindness,* p. 47.

[2] David Masson, *op. cit.,* V, 672.

[3] *Ibid.,* IV, 526. [4] *Ibid.,* V, 265. [5] *Ibid.,* p. 275.

and the *Defence of Himself,* works which are discussed elsewhere in this book. Besides the pamphlets, *A Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes; Considerations touching the likeliest means to remove Hirelings out of the Church; A Declaration of the Election of this present King of Poland, John the III; The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth;* and *Of True Religion, Heresy, Schism, and Toleration,* Milton was occupied in writing several extended prose works, among which were *The History of Britain,* a *Latin Dictionary,* and the *Christian Doctrine.*

Regarding *The History of Britain,* Dr. Johnson says:

To compile a history from various authors, when they can only be consulted by other eyes, is not easy, nor possible, but with more skillful and attentive help than can commonly be obtained, and it was probably the difficulty of consulting and comparing that stopped Milton's narrative at the Conquest, a period at which affairs were not yet very intricate, nor authors very numerous.[6]

It is not possible to ascertain how much Milton had accomplished on his history before he lost his sight. Judging from his many activities of that period, it is likely that most of the work was done later. There is a tendency among the sighted to underestimate the ability of the visually handicapped to do research. But I do not think it wise to conclude that it is impossible for the blind to write a history. I have been told many times that I would not be able to do a thing which afterwards I accomplished. It is not so much the physical handicap as the will to do which should be the determining factor. The blind themselves, more than anyone else, are the best judges of their own ability. I can not see why the research for writing a history would be any harder than that for any other kind of work. Of course, not all blind people are adapted to research, any more than are all the sighted. But Milton, with his store of knowledge, his orderliness, his systematic procedure, his capacity for study, would find little difficulty in compiling a history. He may have intended to write *The History of Britain* only through the Conquest, or his interest in poetry, rather than his blindness, may have turned him from this channel.

With reference to the *Latin Dictionary,* Dr. Johnson considered that it was not a work to be undertaken by a blind man. Hayley says that the dictionary, "a work to which blindness was peculiarly unfavorable, was never brought to maturity, yet served to amuse this most diligent of authors almost to the close of his life."[7] As for myself, I would never attempt such a compilation, but I should not wish to judge another's ability by my own. Johnson himself employed a number of amanuenses in compiling his dictionary. Certainly Milton could secure as efficient assistance as Johnson had. In spite of blindness Milton possessed studious, disciplined habits of

[6] Samuel Johnson, "Milton," in his *Lives of the English Poets,* Oxford, 1905, I, 87.

[7] William Hayley, *The Life of Milton,* London, 1796, p. 146.

work which were foreign to the lethargic doctor. Yet the fact remains that at his death Milton's dictionary was not in shape for publication. That the work was incomplete probably was not due to blindness alone. His other voluminous prose works and his immortal poetry would have absorbed even the energies of a sighted man. After all, no one can postpone death to a convenient season when all his planned work is finished.

The writing of the *Treatise of Christian Doctrine* seems to me to present no difficulties. Primarily it contains but two elements, Milton's beliefs and their proofs. The poet possessed a reasoning, contemplative mind. The reading he had done before he lost his sight may or may not have determined his beliefs. Certainly the exposition of his religious concepts would have required no research that could not have been done in blindness. His proofs are taken wholly from the Bible. It is difficult for us to conceive how familiar with the Bible was the ordinary man of the seventeenth century. Milton's daily reading of it for sixty years would have made him know many of its passages by heart. This knowledge would have been increased by the writing of the pamphlets on divorce and those against episcopacy. When Milton finally set himself to the composition of the *Christian Doctrine,* the date of the writing of which is a matter of speculation, he probably knew the exact book, chapter, and verse which he wished his amanuensis to quote.

For succeeding ages Milton's work of most importance is in *Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained,* and *Samson Agonistes.* One of these poems alone would have been a monumental work for any writer. The difficulties that Milton may have experienced in writing these poems are of a different nature and will be considered next.

Perhaps no man, before or since, had more thorough preparation for his life work than Milton. Just when this preparation began we do not know. At the age of twelve, he was studying until after midnight, according to Edward Philips.[8] Since he was ready to enter Cambridge before he was fifteen years of age, since he was studying all day and half the night at the age of twelve, it is likely that this preparation began when he was a very young child.

Milton's life was one continuous training school. He received his B.A. and his M.A. at Cambridge, augmenting this education with five years of isolated study at Horton. Then for fifteen months he fortified his knowledge abroad, meeting famous men and discussing with them some of the leading questions of the day. Upon his return, he settled down to conducting a private school and to writing controversial tracts. Philips tells us that his pupils read some works for him and reported their contents,[9] thereby increasing his knowledge. Milton could hardly have used this method for very important books, since secondhand information is not adequate for

[8] Edward Philips, *op. cit.,* p. 355.
[9] *Ibid.,* p. 363.

building up such sure and comprehensive knowledge as he would desire and did possess. He might, however, have used this scheme in order to save his failing vision. After his marriage, in addition to more political and religious pamphlets, he wrote *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates, Eikonoklastes,* and the *First Defence.* In 1652 he was totally blind. Teaching, writing, and study had all contributed to his vast fund of information. He had never had to work in order to live and had therefore been able to accumulate knowledge of an almost inconceivable range and to an almost incomprehensible extent.

How much actual study Milton did after his loss of sight can not be ascertained. It seems probable that at this time the period of preparation ended and the poet concerned himself for the most part with creative writing—not that he ceased studying entirely, for we know that he read some new books that were of interest to him, and that he must have consulted authors with whom he was already familiar; but that on the whole he was primarily concerned with writing rather than acquiring.

I do not wish to indicate that blindness would force him to give up his study. But there had to come a time when, if he wished to carry out the aim of his life, the emphasis had to be shifted, and the time of change would come most naturally when readjustment in other matters had to be made. The very nature of blindness requires, for some things, at least, more time. Milton could read a book for himself more quickly than it could be read to him. Since he had been making use of all the available hours before the loss of his sight, some activity had to be curtailed or given up. Reducing the amount of time devoted to study must then have been the solution of Milton's problem, since his knowledge was already more than adequate for any of his needs.

Fletcher says that the *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio* "marks the end of direct employment of Semitic study without artistic embellishment which would indicate that the Semitic field grew not at all for Milton following his blindness."[10]

It might be argued, from the evidence that five or six amanuenses wrote in his *Common-Place Book,* that Milton studied extensively after his loss of sight.[11] But he had used an amanuensis several years before, according to Masson.

The precious volume of Milton MSS. in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge, containing the drafts of most of Milton's English Poems between 1630 and 1658, distinctly proves that even before 1648 he had occasionally employed amanuenses. Though nearly all before that date is in his own hand, there are scraps in other hands.[12]

[10] Harris Fletcher, *Milton's Semitic Studies,* Chicago, 1926, p. 63.

[11] *A Common-Place Book of John Milton* . . . with an introduction by A. J. Horwood, London, 1876, p. 12.

[12] David Masson, *op. cit.,* IV, 427.

Since such had been his practice, it is not possible to ascertain which entries in the *Common-Place Book* were made before or after he became blind, and which books there mentioned were studied after the loss of his sight. Horwood says, "It will be noticed that the numerous chroniclers and writers of English history vouched . . . by . . . Milton in his *History of Britain* do not seem to have been read by him while the *Common-Place Book* was in process of compilation."[13]

Cook asserts that Milton "did not after his blindness cease to add to knowledge by reading."[14] He did add to his knowledge, but by no means to the same extent as he regularly had before. "He would have wanted little help from books," said Dr. Johnson, "had he retained the power of perusing them."[15] Supporting the view that the poet continued to study, Horwood says that the sources of his *History of Britain* "may have been consulted by him (seriatim) as he made progress with the work."[16] On the other hand he adds of *Paradise Lost*:

> It is easier to see that he drew from his store of acquired knowledge than to ascertain the exact sources of it. . . . The wealth of allusion in the great poem composed after he became blind seems impossible except on the supposition of adventitious aid previously prepared.[17]

Since there is a diversity of opinion as to the amount of study done by Milton after his loss of vision, there seems no reason against the conclusion that this amount was reduced.

Two conditions under which Milton had to study and write must have been at times exceedingly irksome to him. First, by necessity he worked not when he wanted to or was fit, but only when he could secure the aid of a reader or an amanuensis. Second, when an important idea came to him, he must retain it in his mind till some one put it down on paper. This second condition the blind of today need not undergo; their knowledge of Braille and typewriting eliminates this difficulty. In a natural history written by Geronimo Cardano in the sixteenth century there is "a device for teaching the blind to read and write by the sense of touch, which is not very different from the modern invention of Braille."[18] Sir John Evelyn,[19] a contemporary of Milton, speaks in his diary of a type for the blind which was invented during his day by Sir Samuel Morland, himself blind. Yet neither of these systems was available to Milton.

Dictating also offered problems to the poet. Any description of his methods of dictation must be drawn largely from the imagination, since

[13] *A Common-Place Book of John Milton,* p. 10.

[14] John Milton, *Paradise Lost;* Books 1 and 2, edited, with introduction and notes, by Albert S. Cook, Boston, 1896, p. 25.

[15] Samuel Johnson, *op. cit.,* p. 90.

[16] *A Common-Place Book of John Milton,* p. 8.

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] Fielding Garrison, *op. cit.,* p. 210.

[19] John Evelyn, *op. cit.,* III, 320.

individuals differ in their manner of oral composition, and since every amanuensis requires a different method of procedure. I can do little in describing his method except to base it upon my own experience and that of others.

With reference to the *Common-Place Book* there are a few things that we may assume. Milton's familiarity with it would enable him to name the particular page and caption which he wished to find. Blindness would tend to increase this facility in locating the references for his readers, so that inscription in it would gradually become a matter of simple dictation. A good writer seldom formulates a sentence as he wishes to leave it. Doubtless Milton found it necessary often to make corrections. We have evidence of this in the *Common-Place Book*. Horwood points out that

> In one or two cases where the handwriting was by an Amanuensis the entry seems to have been made while Milton dictated the sentence: the scribe has had just time to write or begin words, when (the sentence being incomplete) Milton directed them to be cancelled and then substituted another phrase. An instance of this treatment is at page 77.[20]

Only stereotyped and platitudinous writing could be dictated without any change, and Milton's style was certainly neither of these.

The difficulty of dictating in a foreign tongue is infinitely greater than dictating in one's own. It offered, however, fewer hardships in the seventeenth century, when foreign languages were known to a greater extent and to a larger majority than in our own day. Even so, we are reminded of the circumstance when we learn that Milton was forced to spell out to a boy all the Latin words in the letter to Peter Heimbach. This, however, must have been an extreme case. I can not conceive of the poet's having such incompetent amanuenses most of the time. It must be borne in mind that, working as constantly as he seems to have worked, there must have been times when he had to make use of some one who was not fitted to do the more difficult tasks. Letters to his friends could be given to such a person, since to those friends he could explain, knowing that they would understand, the conditions under which he was forced to work. It is known that Milton read eight languages and dictated in most of them. Philips says that his daughters

> were condemned to the performance of reading, and exactly pronouncing of all the languages of whatever book he should at one time or another see fit to peruse; viz., the Hebrew and, (I think,) the Syriac, the Greek, the Latin, the Italian, Spanish and French.[21]

Another difficulty for Milton was that he was unable to see mistakes made by his amanuensis. Familiarity with the tendencies of a particular scribe doubtless enabled him to forestall some of the obvious errors, and

[20] *A Common-Place Book of John Milton*, p. 9.
[21] Edward Philips, *op. cit.*, p. 380.

the difficulty could be lessened by the able assistance of such a man as Andrew Marvell, who comprehended the way in which Milton wished to have things done. It is, however, practically impossible to anticipate and provide against all the mistakes which an amanuensis could make. Recently I had an illustrative experience. I bought a small looseleaf notebook, intending to put an address on each page. After inscribing at least ten pages in this manner, I gave it to my new secretary to complete. I omitted telling her that each address was placed on a separate leaf, thinking of course that she would see that. I discovered that she was not placing the addresses on separate pages only when I attempted to discard those with which I had finished. As a consequence the book had to be done over.

In the matter of dictation the best safeguard is experience. That Milton, like any other blind person, had to exercise more vigilance than the average writer is without question. Booth Tarkington's case may throw a little light on the problem.

> Today, due to his long months of blindness, he evolves his books by dictating and re-dictating to an amanuensis. He has been heard to say that this method of work removes all labor from literary endeavor. Careful observers, however, noted that *Mirthful Haven* was patiently cut, revised, re-cut, and re-revised before it left his hands; and that the proofs of that same novel were read to him six times and a thousand changes laboriously dictated, before the proofs were finally released for publication.[22]

If Booth Tarkington in writing a single novel reread the proof six times and made more than a thousand changes, I find myself wondering how many times Milton reread *Paradise Lost* and how many changes he made.

Of the composition and dictation of *Paradise Lost* Richardson furnishes an interesting picture. He had heard that when Milton dictated "he sat leaning backward obliquely in an easy chair, with his leg flung over the elbow of it"; also that "he frequently composed lying in bed in a morning," or at night when he was unable to sleep. When the song came upon him "with a certain *impetus*" he would ring for his daughter, no matter what the hour, to write down the verses. Richardson adds, "I have been also told he would Dictate many, perhaps 40 Lines as it were in a Breath, and then reduce them to half the Number."[23] Masson[24] doubts this procedure, and I concur in his opinion. Poetry, even blank verse, is more easily retained in the mind than prose. Milton would surely find it more satisfactory to prune, remodel, and polish his verses in his own mind, rather than from the dictation of his amanuensis. I doubt not that Milton knew the greater part of *Paradise Lost* by heart. Such turning over in his own mind would produce more finished results and certainly be easier for him.

[22] Kenneth Roberts, "Gentleman from Maine and Indiana," *Saturday Evening Post,* CCIV, 14 (August 8, 1931).

[23] Jonathan Richardson, *Life of Milton,* London, 1734, p. 143.

[24] David Masson, *op. cit.,* VI, 466.

The breaks in thought in *Paradise Lost* have been supposed by some scholars to coincide with the number of lines which Milton could retain at one time for dictation. Yet I seriously question this claim, since Milton probably retained in memory the lines he had previously composed and could therefore take up the thread of thought wherever and whenever he pleased. Naturally the number of lines which he could retain would increase with practise. Age might tend, however, to offset that increase.

It has also been maintained that the shifting of the caesura in Milton's lines was due to the fact that he was unable to see the lines. This seems to me to be a very inadequate explanation, since Milton before he was blind would have learned where according to custom the caesura should fall. His ear was far too keen to fail to observe any change. If he shifted the caesura, and he certainly did, it was because he chose to do so. Let us note how in the first five lines of Book I the caesura is moved steadily backward toward the beginning of the lines:

> Of Mans First Disobedience, / and the Fruit
> Of that Forbidden Tree, / whose mortal tast
> Brought Death into the World, / and all our woe,
> With loss of *Eden,* / till one greater Man
> Restore us, / and regain the blissful Seat. . . .

It would seem that Milton placed the caesura at the point where it, together with the meter, would secure the proper sense and correct emphasis. Certainly the shifting of the caesura is one of the chief features which make *Paradise Lost* musically more varied than most blank verse.

No discussion of dictation would be complete without reference to Richard Bentley and his freak theory. Bentley claimed that after Milton completed *Paradise Lost* the proofsheets were never read to him, and that he was therefore at the mercy of the amanuenses, the printers, and the editor. "Unless he was as deaf as blind, he (Milton) could not possibly let pass such gross and palpable faults; nay, the edition when published was never read to him in seven years time."[25] Bentley further alleged that the amanuensis, weary of his task, would take down words similar in sound but differing in meaning. That could have happened, but to maintain that the amanuensis in his weariness interpolated verses of his own, as Bentley did maintain, is nothing short of absurd. Perhaps he suspected the scribe of that of which he himself was guilty: viz., of interpolation and substitution, for some of Bentley's lines are so far from resembling the original that the changes appear ridiculous.

Of the 1,055 emendations by Bentley, only two have been formally accepted by later scholars. In Book Seven, lines 321 and 451 appeared in the first edition as:

[25] John Milton, *Paradise Lost,* a new edition by Richard Bentley, London, 1732; Preface.

The smelling Gourd, up stood the Cornie Reed,
Let th' Earth bring forth Fowle living in her kinde.

Bentley and subsequent editors have substituted *swelling* for *smelling* and *soul* for *fowle*. Of these emendations Mackail remarks that

in each case they represent alteration only of a letter or two in a single word. . . . In each case they may be legitimately considered as misprints which had escaped notice both in the original proof-correcting and in the revision for the second edition.[26]

Of course Milton's blindness may have been responsible for the failure to see a typographical error, though it should be remembered that had he retained his sight he might not have been a perfect textual critic, since no one is. Several other alterations in single words are convincing to Mackail.

Three are: ii, 90, *vessels of his anger* for *vassals of his anger;* ii, 256, *lazie yoke for easie yoke;* and xi, 694, *glory won of triumph* for *glory done of triumph*.[27]

Yet I find myself questioning the substitution of *lazie yoke* for *easie yoke*. If these alterations are correct, again blindness could have been responsible for the errors.

Most of the Bentley emendations are comic. In Book Three alone, some of his choice corrections are:

For "those other two," read "the Grecian bard," l. 33.
For "Of Nature's works," read "All nature's map," l. 59.
For "the whole race of mankind," read "All human race his spoil," l. 161.
For "giving to death," read "living to teach," l. 229.
For "circling canopy," read "most extended Cones," l. 556.
For "His Habit fit for speed succinct," read "His pace and look, as bent on speed," l. 643.

Of the Bentley theory Grierson says, "Whether he believed this or not, I cannot feel sure."[28] De Quincey's sarcastic summary states the accepted view of its value. "Bentley resigned himself luxuriously, without the whisper of a scruple, to his own sense of what was or was not poetic, which sense happened to be that of the adder for music."[29]

In spite of the Bentley theory, there is every reason to believe that Milton gave scrupulous attention to the dictation and proofs of *Paradise Lost*. Masson concludes:

[26] J. W. Mackail, "Bentley's Milton," *Proceedings of the British Academy,* XI (1924), 69.

[27] *Ibid.,* p. 70.

[28] H. J. C. Grierson, "Preface," in *Poems of John Milton; English, Latin, Greek, Italian,* London, 1926, II, 46.

[29] Thomas De Quincey, "Milton," in *De Quincey's Literary Criticism,* edited . . . by H. Darbishire, London, 1909, p. 470.

He must have taken all pains possible to a blind man to insure correctness, and he must have had scholarly friends to revise the sheets for him and to read them aloud to him for his approval.[30]

With reference to the care of the manuscript and the proof, Richardson comments:

That the original MS. was of the Hand-Writing of Several is Agreed, but does That appear by the Printed Book? Nothing Less; 'tis Uniform Throughout: it must have Then been Revis'd and Corrected by Some one, Directed at least, and that This was *Milton* himself is Evident by its Exact Conformity with his Spelling and Pointing in What he Publish'd when he had his Sight; as also with his Other Works after That was gone.[31]

A single example of Milton's precision in dictation and proofing will be found in his use of *their* and *thir*. It should be noted that Milton spelled the word *thir* instead of *their* when he wished to place emphasis upon it. And so, in Book I, lines 347-349 and 361-363 read:

> . . . th' uplifted Spear
> Of *their* great Sultan waving to direct
> *Thir* course . . .
> Though of *their* Names in heav'nly Records now
> Be no memorial, blotted out and ras'd
> By *thir* Rebellion. . . .

The change from *their* to *thir* in lines so closely connected can hardly be regarded as an error. It indicates rather the deliberate and scrupulous care of the poet in the preparation of the manuscript and the correction of the proof. That there are irregularities in *Paradise Lost* is without question. It is difficult, however, to determine which irregularities were for the purpose of producing an effect and which were the result of mistakes in copying and in proof reading. I am inclined to believe that most of the so-called mistakes are not mistakes but irregularities.

Blindness may have been responsible for some of the mistakes in *Paradise Lost*. There is a tendency, however, to attribute to blindness mistakes which, occurring among the sighted, would of necessity be given a different explanation. Every book contains errors. But if a blind person publishes, all mistakes are attributed to the fact that he has been unable to proof read with his own eyes. Knowledge of this judgment leads the sightless author to use extraordinary precaution. In a chapter entitled "An Inquiry into the Use of Synizesis in Shakespearean and Miltonic Verse," van Dam and Stoffel point out, "Absolutely faultless, of course, that text is not. It was impossible for the blind Milton to do his proof reading with absolute correctness."[32] I would add that it is impossible for anyone to do his proof reading with

[30] David Masson, *op. cit.*, VI, 14. [31] Jonathan Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 150.
[32] B. A. van Dam and Cornelius Stoffel, *Chapters on English Printing, Prosody, and Pronunciation, (1550-1700)*, Heidelberg, 1902, p. 122.

absolute correctness. *Paradise Lost* contains, after all, fewer mistakes than the works of Marvell, Cowley, Wither, and Browne. Milton's text, likewise, is far more perfect than the writings of Shelley and Wordsworth. They seem to have lacked woefully that phase of scholarship which deals with textual criticism. Had such a lack been characteristic of Milton, it would doubtless have been attributed to blindness, though another explanation must be found for the negligence of Wordsworth and Shelley.

Having presented the Bentley theory, let us continue with the problem of dictation. Wood,[33] Aubrey,[34] and Philips are all of the opinion that Milton's daughters, Mary and Deborah, read to their father and wrote as he dictated to them. Philips said:

> And those daughters he had by his first wife he made serviceable to him in that very particular in which he most wanted their service, and supplied his want of eyesight by their eyes and tongue. For though he had daily about him one or another to read to him, some persons of man's estate, who of their own accord greedily catch'd at the opportunity of being his readers that they might as well reap the benefit of what they read to him, and oblige him by the benefit of their reading; others, of younger years sent by their parents to the same end; yet excusing only the eldest daughter by reason of bodily infirmity and difficult utterance of speech, (which to say truth I doubt was the principal cause of excusing her) the other two were condemn'd to the performance of reading, and exactly pronouncing of all the languages of whatever book he should at one time or another see fit to peruse . . . all which sorts of books to be confined to read without understanding one word, must needs be a trial of patience, almost beyond endurance; yet it was endured by both for a long time. Yet the irksomeness of this employment could not always be concealed, but broke out more and more into expressions of uneasiness; so that at length they were all (even the eldest also) sent out to learn some curious and ingenious sorts of manufacture, that are proper for women to learn, particularly imbroideries in gold or silver.[35]

Surely the ability to understand what one reads is more pleasurable than reading without understanding; however, many do not comprehend even in their own tongue. It should be remembered that when Milton went blind Deborah was probably not yet born and Mary was but four years old. When *Paradise Lost* appeared in 1667, Deborah was only fifteen and her sister nineteen. Since Milton's daughters, during most of this time, were but children and the books which he wished to hear were far beyond their years, I feel that it was scarcely an added hardship that they were in a foreign language.

Their ages, Cook declared, exclude the idea that Milton's daughters were his chief assistants.[36] I do not believe that Philips, Aubrey, or Wood

[33] Anthony Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 483.
[34] John Aubrey, *op. cit.*, p. 337.
[35] Edward Philips, *op. cit.*, p. 380.
[36] Albert S. Cook, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

meant to give the impression that his daughters were his main helpers. To quote Wood: ". . . Deborah was the third daughter, trained up by the father in Lat. and Greek, and made by him his amanuensis."[37] Aubrey's statement agrees with Wood's and neither of them suggests that Deborah was her father's chief assistant. If Deborah aided her father more than did her sister Mary, and there is reason to believe she did, her age would eliminate the idea of her being Milton's main helper. Yet it is surprising how readily, when a parent is blind, children adjust themselves to meet the situation. A friend told me recently that her little daughter, who is but two years of age, is accustomed to leading her sightless grandfather to a chair. No doubt many stories could be told of the serviceableness of children to a blinded relative or friend. It is likely that Milton's daughters were more useful to him as children than when they became older. We know that later they were undutiful and were finally sent away from home. Masson believes that the story of the rôle of Milton's daughters has been augmented by Miss Manning's fictitious *Deborah's Diary* (1859).[38]

We know that five or six hands were engaged in the copying of the Milton manuscripts after he lost his sight. Two of these scribes could have been his daughters, Mary and Deborah. From Letter 31 we know that one of the amanuenses was a boy. Miss Darbishire concludes that John Philips was another.[39] We know from Edward Philips's biography that he had something to do with the correcting of the manuscript of *Paradise Lost,* for he wrote:

> . . . I had the perusal of it from the very beginning, for some years, as I went from time to time to visit him, in a parcel of ten, twenty, or thirty verses at a time, which being written by whatever hand came next, might possibly want corrections as to the orthography and pointing . . .[40]

Richardson bestows his sympathies not on the daughters but on Milton. He feels that teaching them was an added hardship, made necessary because Milton was too poor to employ an amanuensis.[41] Why Richardson, or anyone else, should assume that Milton was too poor to secure the services of an assistant is hard to comprehend. According to his will, he had at his death a little more than a thousand pounds,[42] which in those days could hardly be regarded as pauperism. Moreover, he turned out entirely too much work to have depended solely upon chance aid when friends dropped in. My own work requires far too much time to rely upon the help of friends, and when I compare its bulk with Milton's, I am convinced that he had to have an amanuensis at a given time in order to produce such an amount. He may not always have paid this assistant in money, but as in Ellwood's

[37] Anthony Wood, *op. cit.,* p. 486.
[38] "Masson's First Lecture at Edinburgh," *Nation,* II (February 8, 1866), 181.
[39] *Early Lives of Milton,* p. 19.
[40] Edward Philips, *op. cit.,* p. 380.
[41] Jonathan Richardson, *op. cit.,* p. 111.
[42] David Masson, *op. cit.,* VI, 744.

case, he may have given instruction in return.[43] Aubrey corroborates my belief that Milton had a regularly employed amanuensis or amanuenses:

He was an early riser, *sc.* at 4 o'clock manè, yea, after he lost his sight. He had a man read to him. The first thing he read was the Hebrew Bible. . . . At 7 his man came to him again, and then read to him and wrote till dinner; the writing was as much as the reading.[44]

On account of statements made by his biographers, and interpretations put upon these statements by others as well as various other circumstances, there has grown up the legend that Milton was cruel to his daughters. It is evident that no one condition is responsible for the idea, but that all helped to contribute. Milton was totally blind by 1652, at which time he was left with the care of three motherless children: the oldest, a girl of six; Mary, aged four; and Deborah, an infant. The care of these small children for the most part had to be given over to servants. It was natural, therefore, that the children should grow up resisting discipline and the tasks put upon them by their father. Perhaps Milton's eagerness to forge ahead far exceeded their unwilling childish effort. Perhaps this circumstance contributed not a little to the idea of Milton's cruel treatment. Yet there is absolutely no foundation for such a belief. The reading of eight languages, not understood, may have been a hardship. It could hardly be regarded as cruelty. Milton is sometimes reproached for not having educated his daughters. He was wont to say jokingly that one language was enough for a woman. Deborah Milton stated, however, that they were not sent away to school; but that they were all taught at home by a mistress employed for that purpose.[45] In view of the status of education for women in the seventeenth century, the employment of a mistress to train Milton's daughters was, I believe, out of the ordinary. That they were not taught to understand Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and the like may have been due in part to the fact that they did not wish to learn foreign languages. Milton's chief aim, it is true, was to make his daughters serviceable to him. Since education for women in those days was not regarded as essential, Milton can hardly be blamed if, in one respect alone, he fell short of the standards of today.

Richardson explains Milton's conduct very sensibly, I believe:

A Man that Practises Severity on Himself in an Exact Observation of Vertue's Commands, finds himself Obliged by those very Laws to Exact a like Obedience from All under his Care. I have Heard, and do Believe, and Allow, *Milton's* family was a Well Order'd Government; Licentiousness was not Permitted by Him: he could be a Rigid Monarch Here with a good Grace; he could require Vertue, Frugality, and Strict Discipline (which Women and Children fail not to call Severity) as he bravely Led the Way, by being an Example, and Able moreover to Stand a Retrospect into his own Behaviour when Young, and through all the stages of Life.[46]

[43] Thomas Ellwood, *op. cit.*, p. 146.
[44] John Aubrey, *op. cit.*, p. 337.
[45] David Masson, *op. cit.*, VI, 446.
[46] Jonathan Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

That Milton's daughters resisted their father's rigidity is, I believe, not foreign to the conduct of motherless children. Yet this willfulness which they exhibited should not be converted into a charge of cruelty against Milton, though their conduct must not be too harshly judged. Masson relates that, when Milton's intention of marriage to Elizabeth Minshull became known,

it naturally caused some consternation among the daughters. The maidservant, or one of the maidservants then in the house, told the second daughter, Mary, that she heard her father was to be married, to which the said Mary replied to the said maidservant that that was no news to hear of his wedding, but if she could hear of his death that was something.[47]

As a further proof of Milton's daughters' misconduct we read from Milton's nuncupative will, attested by his brother Christopher, that

The portion due to me from Mr. Powell, my former wife's father, I leave to the unkind children I had by her, having received no part of it; but my meaning is they shall have no other benefit of my estate than the said portion and what I have besides done for them, they having been very undutiful to me.[48]

Milton must have had cause for feeling that his daughters were undutiful, for Masson tells us:

"All his said children did combine together and counsel his maidservant to cheat him in her marketings"; and "his said children had made away some of his books, and would have sold the rest of his books to the dunghill women." These horrible statements were made on oath after Milton's death by a witness who had received the information from himself, and in a context which referred the facts to the year 1662.[49]

These statements, while they point to the unruly conduct of the children, in no sense fortify an idea of Milton's cruelty. With age comes understanding. And so we are not surprised to read that Deborah Milton, when she had become a woman and a mother, spoke of her father with great tenderness.[50] If she had ever been misled into feeling that her father's rigidity was too severe, time had aided her in regarding it in the proper light. So, I think, should succeeding ages regard Milton's conduct to his daughters. His treatment of them was in no sense cruel, though doubtless rigid.

Together with the belief of Milton's cruelty to his children has grown up the tradition that Milton dictated *Paradise Lost* to his daughters. This belief owes its origin chiefly to a painting by Michael Munkacsy, "Milton Dictating *Paradise Lost* to His Daughters." It shows the poet, in sober dress, sitting in an armchair.

[47] David Masson, *op. cit.*, Vol. 6, p. 476. [48] *Ibid.*, p. 735.
[49] *Ibid.*, p. 448.
[50] Jonathan Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

Opposite around a table covered with oriental tapestry, his three daughters are grouped. One of them is occupied with embroidery, the other is standing near the table, and the third is leaning over a manuscript with a pen in her hand.[51]

The enraptured comments by the reviewers of the picture were in keeping with the rapt expression which the artist painted on the faces of the daughters. A fair sample of this effusion reads,

The two first ones, delightful figures, with a real English distinguished charm, look at their father with an admiring and at the same time impassionate tenderness; the third, with her face towards her father, seems to listen with intense attention, in order to transfer immediately to the paper the inspired words that flow from his lips.[52]

The rapt expression alone would indict the painting, since such adoration flies in the face of all known facts of the daughters' attitudes. Masson considers the picture "pure fantasy"[53] and I have found nothing to bear out its authenticity.

I conclude, therefore, that after Milton's loss of sight the emphasis shifted from active preparation to creation. Having to depend entirely upon an amanuensis, he would need to exercise more vigilance, and, contrary to the Bentley theory, he gave more scrupulous attention to the dictation and proofing of his works than most writers. He made use of the services of his daughters, but could not depend upon them as completely as is popularly supposed nor did he receive from them the devotion pictured by Munkacsy. On the other hand, there is no foundation for the belief of his cruelty to them.

[51] *Opinions of the Continental Press on Munkacsy and His Latest Picture, "Milton Dictating Paradise Lost to His Daughters,"* Paris, 1879, p. 11.

[52] *Ibid.*

[53] "Masson's First Lecture at Edinburgh," p. 181.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PROBLEM OF MILTON AUTOGRAPHS

To the scholar the question of the authenticity of existing Milton signatures presents complex problems. "Milton's handwriting is especially difficult to identify with certainty," Hugh Candy maintains, "because it has not the singular individuality possessed by his literary style."[1] Perhaps Mr. Candy's statement is a trifle exaggerated. However, the problem of the authenticity of Milton autographs supposed to date from after the loss of his sight remains unsolved. It is not my purpose to attempt to determine which of the signatures are in Milton's own hand. Such an undertaking on my part would be nothing short of ridiculous. It is, however, my purpose to present some aspects of the subject which may not be evident to the scholar of normal sight.

Little investigation has been made of the validity of the autographs ascribed to Milton. The most extended treatment was undertaken in 1859 by Sotheby, who said that he was "desirous of showing that anybody totally blind is still capable of signing his name and indeed of writing in one continuous line."[2] He secured his evidence from the sighted. He says:

> We are much indebted to the many distinguished antiquarians, literary men and kind friends who have so promptly favored us with the examples of their writing when blindfolded. . . . It was a novel idea of ours and we plead guilty to having designed it, not only for the purpose avowed, but to add interesting material to our specially illustrated copy of the present.[3]

His comment is his own arraignment. It is indeed a novel idea, and he needs to plead guilty. His methods for reaching his conclusions were utterly unscientific, though his conclusions are absolutely correct. I described his experiment, as he had related it, to the principal of a school for the blind. He laughed heartily, as I had upon reading it.

Let us consider why Sotheby's scholastic venture is valueless. To those actually familiar with blindness and its problems the fallacy of his method is immediately discernible, though difficult to express. Any blindfolded, sighted individual undergoing the test is obviously quite conscious that he is not blind. His psychology, therefore, is not the same as that of a person who has lost his sight. The natural tendency of the sighted would be to place pen and paper ready for use before being blindfolded. Whether those co-operating with Sotheby in his experiment did this or not, he does not indicate, but the fact remains that the signatures were made immediately

[1] Hugh C. Candy, "The Miltonic-Ovid Script," *Notes and Queries*, 12th series, XII (January-June, 1923), 426-28.

[2] S. L. Sotheby, *op. cit.*, p. 141. [3] *Ibid.*

after the bandage was placed over the eyes. Such sequence destroys any possibility of forgetting the motor sensation of writing one's name. In order to test the absurdity of the experiment, if the reader will blindfold himself and write his name, he will find that his signature will be almost identical with the one made under normal conditions. A blind person's signature tends towards illegibility with less frequent use. Sir Arthur Pearson testifies:

Those who can already write when they become blind are seldom able to continue to do so legibly for long. The eye is no longer able to correct the mistakes which the hand makes and which therefore tend to become more and more accentuated. The two most noticeable instances of this are making the characters too small and omitting to carry forward the hand fast enough. My own writing, unless I am careful and think of every letter, is practically unreadable.[4]

I am not able to decide whether Sir Arthur referred to continued writing or to the signature. If his reference is to continued writing, I agree with his statement, for I do not believe that extensive writing is practicable for the blind, though it is sometimes done, usually with a pencil rather than with a pen. If, however, he referred to autographs of the blind, I agree only in part. I possess evidence that those who have lost their sight in adult life can produce legible signatures.

Having invalidated the Sotheby experiment, but having also indicated that the blind can write legibly, let us next consider some of the difficulties which they undergo in signing, particularly with a pen. It must be borne in mind that if Milton wrote his name, he was forced to use a quill pen, whereas the blind of today may use either an indelible pencil or a stylographic pen, which feeds the ink more slowly and insures less blotting.

The only way to prove that blind people can sign their names is to secure their signatures. Recently I sent out a questionnaire to a number of sightless people in the business world. From their answers and from the information gleaned from others, it is safe to conclude that the majority of blind people, regardless of when they lost their sight, prefer to sign with an indelible pencil, rather than with ink—a sufficient indication that a pencil on the whole offers fewer difficulties. But since Milton was forced to use ink, we must confine ourselves to the discussion of that phase of the problem.

I have already pointed out that lack of practice tends to make the signatures of the blind less legible. There are few autographs which have come down to us that may be ascribed to Milton after he lost his sight. Cook concludes, "It would be difficult to produce a good autograph of his of a later date than 1652."[5] British Museum authorities maintain that no signatures of Milton bearing dates after 1651 are his own.[6] Masson says that the only authentic specimen of his signature or handwriting of later date

[4] Sir Arthur Pearson, *op. cit.*, p. 129. [5] Albert Cook, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
[6] *Milton 1608-1674; Facsimiles of Autographs and Documents in the British Museum,* London, 1908.

than 1652 is the autograph found on his application for a marriage license, dated February 11, 1662, and located in the Faculty office, by Colonel Chester. He describes it thus: "He evidently had a bad and scratchy pen and no perception whatever of the horizontal, but it is an extremely interesting autograph for all that."[7] It should be remembered that no cross nor other symbol, nor yet the signature of the one acting by proxy, was required in that day. Milton needed only to give the pen to his amanuensis.

Obviously one of the difficulties for Milton or any other blind person is the proper placing of the name so that the signature is at equal distance from the writing above. For this purpose some blind people use a ruler, some a blotter, and others a small guide. One man wrote me that he used three fingers of his hands. An acquaintance of mine told me that, in signing a check, he had another person fold the paper just below where the signature should be, then he himself signed along the edge of the fold. Milton must have employed some such means if he signed his name after loss of his sight.

In writing with ink, the blind person also has difficulty in keeping his place whenever he raises the pen to dot an "i," to cross a "t," or to begin a letter not joined to that which has gone before. The fewer times he needs to lift the pen, the less difficulty he will have in keeping the place, a factor in legibility. If the Milton signatures in question show more raisings of the pen than the autographs made by him before the loss of his sight, it is safe to assume that they were made by an amanuensis. A blind person would try to decrease rather than to increase the number of breaks. If, also, these autographs are more legible than those made when he could see, they can hardly be Milton's, since blindness is naturally productive of illegibility.

For the blind, one of the outstanding drawbacks of ink signatures is the danger of blotting. The sightless person must either follow the writing with a finger of the left hand, or employ some kind of guide. One of the most efficient aids which has been invented is a wire rectangle, about three inches in length and an inch in width. It is placed upon the paper and held by the fingers of the left hand. This enables a blind person to make a straight signature of a given height. When the pen strikes the frame, the ink flows below the point of contact, since the wire is round. Smudging is thus avoided. Such a guide, however, is more often used by those who have been blind since childhood, than by those who have lost their sight in adult life. These blinded adults seem to prefer to work out a little scheme of their own. What method Milton used or whether he signed at all is a matter of speculation, not to be here determined. There is no evidence to indicate that he even signed the receipt for payment of *Paradise Lost,* a document which he would surely have wanted to sign, since it represented for him the fulfillment of his life's dream. If he did not sign, blindness alone may not have been responsible. We know that he was seriously af-

[7] David Masson, *op. cit.,* p. 475.

flicted with gout, and, with gouty fingers, writing would certainly be more difficult.

That the blind can sign their names, and fairly legibly, I have proof which I am submitting below, though it is to be remembered that even normal sight does not insure a clear signature. Recently I sent out questionnaires to a number of blind in the United States and Europe. Two replies, presenting contrary viewpoints, are quoted below:

I.

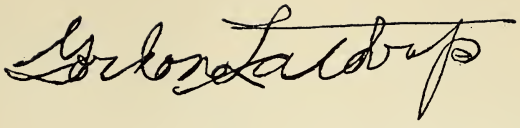
1. At what age did you become blind? 35 years.
2. Do you sign your name with ink? Infrequently.
3. Do you sign your name with ink by necessity or by choice? Only by necessity.
4. Do you sign your name with pencil? Whenever possible, using indelible for checks.
5. Which do you use more for your signature? Pencil.
6. What guide, if any, do you use when you sign your name with ink? The three fingers of my hands.
7. Why do you prefer to sign with ink? I don't.
8. Why do you prefer to sign with pencil? I have no fear of blots nor do I need to regulate the touch of the point so finely.
9. What do you consider are the difficulties of signing with ink? Blotting, scratching, the fact that the pen does not work well upside down and the necessity for maintaining consistent pressure.

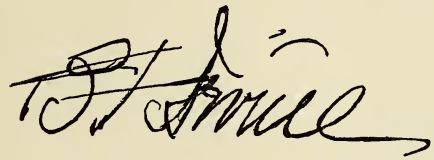
II.

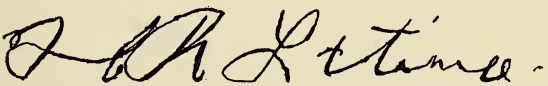
1. At what age did you become blind? Between 30 and 40.
2. Do you sign your name with ink? Ink.
3. Do you sign your name with ink by necessity or choice? Most of my signatures are official.
4. Do you sign your name with pencil? Never.
5. Which do you use more for your signature? ————
6. What guide, if any, do you use when you sign with ink? A ruler.
7. Why do you prefer to sign with ink? ————
8. Why do you prefer to sign with pencil? I have few such requirements.
9. What do you consider are the difficulties of signing with ink? None.

I also sent out questionnaires to a few instructors of the blind. I shall quote in part a reply from Dr. Edward E. Allen, one time Principal of the Overbrook School for the Blind, Overbrook, Pa., and lately director of Perkins Institution for the Blind, Watertown, Mass. Dr. Allen has been in the work for the blind throughout his professional life.

1. How many blind people do you know who sign their names with ink? Not many, perhaps a half dozen, and they once saw well.
2. Do you advocate the use of ink? In general, no. In particular instances as above, yes.
3. If you were not familiar with the names, would you consider that the ink signatures were legible? I of course have seen plenty of signatures that were illegible, but many more that were plain.

① 

② 

③ 

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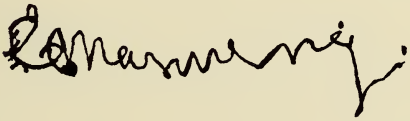
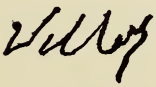
⑤ 

⑥ 

SIGNATURES OF TOTALLY
BLIND PERSONS

4. Why do you recommend ink signatures? I do not, except by those who can do it well.
5. What do you consider are the difficulties of writing with ink? Blotting and not being sure of the result.
6. Do you think the time of loss of sight has anything to do with legibility? In some instances, yes.
7. Do you think continued writing with ink, that is beyond mere signature, is possible? Yes, it is. I have seen a blinded woman write with ink a wholly legible postal card, progressing from thumb at the left to third finger at the right, moving these down the length of the card until she reached the bottom. Of course she visualised it all, since she had lost her sight after reaching an adult age. I have seen one blinded man who devised this means for himself: Rolling a sheet of paper about a pencil and removing the latter, he flattened the roll into facets. He then wrote on one facet after another, unrolling upwards as he progressed. It was easier for him to do this with a pencil.

The plate facing page 128 contains the ink signatures of six totally blind persons, not selected for legibility, but chosen at random.

Number 1 is the signature of a man who became blind at about thirty-five years of age and who seldom signs with a pen.

Number 2 is the signature of a man who lost his sight between thirty and forty and who makes constant use of his ink autograph.

Number 3 is the signature of a man who has been totally blind since the age of twenty-three and who always signs in ink.

Number 4 is the signature of a man blind since five years of age. He prefers signing with pencil but uses ink when necessary.

Number 5 is the signature of a man blind since seventeen years of age.

Number 6 is the signature of a man blind at four years of age.

I conclude, therefore, that the method employed by Sotheby was inadequate, though his deduction that blind people can sign their names was correct. Since this is true, the Milton autographs belonging to the period of blindness may be his; if so, they should be less legible than earlier ones because of lack of practice and gout as well as blindness. If he signed his name, Milton probably strove to decrease rather than increase the number of breaks in his signature. Since, however, the signatures of people with normal sight are not always legible, there may be other conditions functioning which contribute towards illegibility in the signatures of some of the blind.

CHAPTER XVII

THE EFFECTS OF BLINDNESS

"Sightless Milton dreamed visions no one else could see. Radiant with an inward light, he sent forth rays by which mankind beholds the realms of Paradise."[1] This quotation from Helen Keller gives rise to the question, what effect, if any, did Milton's blindness have upon his poetry and life? There are some scholars who maintain that Milton's poetry had reached its high water mark before his loss of sight. This may or may not be true. But whether or not in artistic power he ever surpassed his early work, his poetry was bound to be affected by his blindness. Loss of sight is too poignant a handicap to leave no effect. It enriches a man spiritually and tempers him philosophically.

Hayley discusses the effect of blindness upon Milton as follows:

Strange as the idea may at first appear, perhaps it was better for him, as a man and a poet, to remain without cure; for his devout tenderness and energy of mind had so far converted his calamity into a blessing, that it seems rather to have promoted than obstructed both the happiness of his life and the perfection of his genius. . . . Blindness, indeed, without the aid of religious enthusiasm, has a natural tendency to favour that undisturbed, intense, and continued meditation, which works of magnitude require. Perhaps we sometimes include in the catalogue of disadvantages the very circumstances that have been partly instrumental in leading extraordinary men to distinction. In examining the lives of illustrious scholars we may discover that many of them arose to glory by the impulse of personal misfortune; Bacon and Pope were deformed; Homer and Milton were blind. It has been frequently remarked, that the blind are generally cheerful; it is therefore not marvelous that Milton was far from being dispirited by the utter extinction of his light; but his unconquerable vigor of mind was signally displayed in continuing to labour under all the pains and inconveniences of approaching blindness, a state peculiarly unfavourable to mental exertion.[2]

Richardson also emphasizes the spiritual and philosophical changes brought about by Milton's loss of sight. He says:

I rather think that we owe some of the most Sublime Beauties of the Poem to That Circumstance; his Mind being not Depress'd with it, but Richly Arm'd against the most Calamitous Dispensations of the Divine Will by an Humble and Devout Resignation, and a Philosophical, a Christian Resolution, with a Competent Measure of Supernatural Assistance Enabling him

[1] "The New York that Helen Keller 'Sees,'" *New York Times*, January 31, 1932, Section 5, p. 3.

[2] William Hayley, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

to lay hold of the Advantages which are to be found Accompanying Every Accident, or Providential Event that Can possibly happen in Human Life; as there is No Good, how Bright Soever in Appearance, but carries with it Some Alloy.[3]

Granting that blindness changes a man spiritually and philosophically, the most definite effect upon Milton was the change of emphasis in his interests. During the first period of his life he had been preparing for fame through poetry. During the second period, beginning with 1640, he had spent his energies largely in the cause of freedom, political, personal, and religious. With the Restoration, he withdrew from controversy and political activity, and returned once more to life as a conscious artist. Since, for twenty years, Milton had put aside his own personal aspirations for patriotic reasons, I am inclined to believe that, if blindness had not come upon him and if Charles II had not been restored to the throne, poetry might have been impoverished by the loss of some of Milton's greatest work. Masson leans to the theory that

but for his blindness the chances are that he would long ere now have been a known Parliamentary man. . . . This, or that other alternative of a foreign ambassadorship or residency—might have been the natural career of Milton through the rule of the Cromwells had not blindness disabled him.[4]

Had Milton followed a political career, punishment by death, which he barely escaped even under existing conditions, would have been the inevitable reward at the Restoration. Birrell contends, "He was not one of the regicides—he was only a scribe who had defended regicides."[5] Only a scribe? He who wrote *Eikonoklastes* in answer to *Eikon Basilike?* He whose response to Salmasius' *Defence of the King* was for him, as he said,

My noble task
Of which all Europe talks from side to side?

He who eulogized Cromwell, who sent to the Council his plan for *The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth?* What a scribe!

On the other hand Alden Sampson feels that his activities were of such a nature that it is nothing short of a miracle that he did escape death at the Restoration. "The fact that he was blind must have had its influence in averting prosecution, since it has never been a British trait to strike an adversary when he is down."[6] This opinion is also held by Masson[7] and Fiske.[8] My knowledge of the trials of accused blind is indeed limited, but of the few cases of which I have known, the defendants were not convicted. I am unable to decide whether the verdict of "not guilty" was due merely to the fact that they were blind, though I am inclined to believe that blindness would in some cases be a determining factor.

[3] *Early Lives of Milton,* p. 298.
[4] David Masson, *op. cit.,* VI, 578.
[5] Augustine Birrell, *Obiter Dicta,* London, 1887, p. 33.
[6] Alden Sampson, *op. cit.,* p. 119.
[7] David Masson, *op. cit.,* VI, 189.
[8] John Fiske, "John Milton," *Cosmopolitan,* XXXIV (1902), 52.

Joseph Auslander suggests that "If Milton had not been blind in 1660, he might have fled from the triumphant Royalists to hide in the little Puritan world across the sea and write *Paradise Lost* by Boston Bay."[9] Of course this is only speculation. Milton might have left England for another land, there to sing of Paradise.

No doubt blindness had its effect in making Milton more subjective. He himself believed that insight was increased through the loss of vision:

> And wisdome at one entrance quite shut out.
> So much the rather thou Celestial light
> Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
> Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
> Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
> Of things invisble to mortal sight.

Dr. Villey, a blind scholar, who should be less moved than the average to romanticize, cites as chief among the intellectual advantages of the blind

> a tendency to concentration. . . . There is frequently a certain ponderation. With equal intellectual culture, there is, I think, more frequently more equilibrium and judgment with the gifted blind man than with the man who can see. This is not surprising, for the sight is the sense for amusement. The less one is disturbed in this way, the less the inner dream is interrupted by outer events, the more one is concentrated on one's self, the more one takes time to ripen one's reflections, and to weigh the for and against of one's deliberations.[10]

It is true that everything a blind person does requires thought. For example, a sighted man sees at a glance that his tie is crooked. The blind man must first remind himself to inspect his tie. The extra amount of thinking required of a person without sight should produce a definite habit of concentration. The necessity of relying upon the memory increases the power to remember more accurately.

Seeley believes that a further effect of blindness was the increase of Milton's "faculty in picturing to himself the largest phenomena, a startling talent of presenting by a few slight touches the most stupendous images."[11] Since the poems written after Milton's loss of sight were the only ones requiring stupendous images, it seems to me impossible to conclude that blindness increased this faculty.

The editor of *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* even goes a step further, when he says of *Paradise Lost,* "Such a gigantic conception could not have occurred to any except to a blind man; or if it had occurred to any one else, he could not have sustained it consistently throughout the poem."[12] I should

[9] Joseph Auslander and Frank Hill, *The Winged Horse,* New York, 1927, p. 333.

[10] Pierre Villey, *The World of the Blind,* New York, 1930, p. 33.

[11] J. R. Seeley, *Roman Imperialism,* Boston, 1871, p. 150.

[12] "Milton's Blindness," *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal,* June 21, 1845, p. 392.

like the blind to be given as much credit as possible, but it seems to me that this is a theory which can not be proved. No doubt the claim that only blindness could sustain such a gigantic conception is not without foundation, since this conception would be dependent upon concentration, but on the other hand there certainly are sighted people whose power of concentration is as great as that of the sightless. Dante's *Divine Comedy* is an excellent example of this vastness of concept.

The *Journal's* editor further affirms:

There is a certain class of images, the recollection of which in a state of blindness would always continue to be easy and pleasurable. It would be difficult for a person who had been blind for some time to recall the appearance of such a flower as the violet; whereas he would retain to the last a remarkably vivid conception of white or luminous objects, a lamp, the mouth of a furnace, a streak of light, the sun, the moon, a ball of glowing iron, the ground covered with snow, the winter sky studied with stars.[13]

There is no doubt that one who has lost his sight would retain the images mentioned above, though he would not forget, I believe, the appearance of a violet or anything similar. It has been almost as long since I saw dandelions dotting the grass as was the period during which Milton was able to see, but I still have quite a vivid memory of the picture. I recall, too, a sunflower nodding just above a rail fence. That Milton in a few years should have forgotten what he had seen for so many years and that I should remember what I saw for so few seems altogether incompatible. For any individual, images retained longest in memory are those with a definite emotional accompaniment.

An anonymous writer of *The North British Review* maintains,

Luscious and rich as are Milton's descriptions of Eden, a comparison of these parts of *Paradise Lost* with his earlier poems will show that his recollections of the flowers had faded. The hearse of Lycidas is more beautifully garnished with flowers than the nuptial bower of Eve.[14]

This is also the opinion of the *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* reviewer already quoted. In the floral passage in *Lycidas* Milton names eleven flowers: primrose, crow-toe, jessamine, white pink, pansy, violet, muskrose, woodbine (honey-suckle), cowslip, amaranthus, daffodil.[15] Of this passage Reuben Post Halleck says, "The best botanical critics, after much discussion . . . have concluded that the flowers were chosen, not for their colors but for their fragrance."[16] I have consulted the files of botanical collections and while I have been able to find no reference to support this idea, I am yet

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] "Review of the Works of John Milton," *The North British Review,* XVI (February, 1852), 295.

[15] *Lycidas,* ll. 133-51, in *The Student's Milton,* p. 43.

[16] Reuben Halleck, *Education of the Central Nervous System,* New York, 1904, p. 113.

inclined to believe that Milton chose the flowers, in part at least, for their fragrance. It has long been the custom to choose blossoms of sweet odor for funerals. Yet Milton says definitely that he chose them for their color:

And every flower that sad embroidery wears.

The Chambers' Edinburgh Journal maintains that because of Milton's blindness the nuptial bower of Eve is less beautifully garnished than the hearse of *Lycidas,* yet actually there are nine flowers and flowering shrubs in the description: laurel, myrtle, acanthus, iris, rose, jessamine, violet, crocus, hyacinth.[17] There is, after all, little difference between nine and eleven. The flowers and shrubs used in making the walls and roof of a wedding bower would of necessity differ from those appropriate to a hearse. Moreover, even a sighted poet tends to restraint, simplicity, and less lavish sensory images with advancing age.

The same *Edinburgh* reviewer further contends, "There is not a passage like this floral description in *Lycidas* in all *Paradise Lost.* If the poet, after being blind for some time, had attempted to rival it, he could have accomplished the feat only by the help of a book on botany."[18] If Milton did not consult a book on botany while writing the *Lycidas* flower passage, I see no reason why he would need to consult such a book in order to produce a similar passage in *Paradise Lost.* Why in blindness he should remember some of the flowers and forget others I am unable to comprehend, since those named in *Lycidas* are all common.

The tendency among Milton's critics has been to attribute to his blindness the selection of images in his poetry. Blindness alone, however, may not have determined the choice. Milton, like any other artist who must sift from a voluminous store of material, selected definite images for definite purposes of art. Since in *Paradise Lost* he was writing an epic whose scenes were unknown to mortals, it seems logical that he should describe bright places and dark places, vague regions and vast realms, and so produce the desired elusive effects. If he omitted the ordinary scenes of nature and detailed color work, it was because he hoped by the omission to produce effects appropriate to his supernatural pattern.

J. J. Blunt thinks that Milton's "colors in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* are recollections: They are either golden or black. All the intermediates are forgotten."[19] Milton could hardly have forgotten colors which he had not made use of in his earlier poetry. His color words had been few and conventional, and intermediate shades lacking. His use of color was never abundant even when he could see. According to Walter Graham,

L'Allegro contains only nine color words, and some of these are such conventional adjectives as ebon, amber, russet, saffron and golden. The beauti-

[17] *Paradise Lost,* Book IV, ll. 690-702.
[18] "Milton's Blindness," *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal,* June 21, 1845, p. 394.
[19] J. J. Blunt, "John Milton," *Quarterly Review,* XXXVI (1827), 47.

ful description of Eden in Book Four of *Paradise Lost* contains only seven color words, three of which are forms of gold. Not much then can be said for Milton's use of color in description.[20]

I find no explanation for the absence of color tones in Milton's poetry, but this absence is certainly not due to his loss of sight. Keightley suggests that it was "because he saw life and nature chiefly through the medium of books," that "we rarely meet in him that accuracy of observation which distinguishes Dante."[21] V. P. Squires, in discussing the absence of color, also concludes that Milton did not write with his eye on the object but "in the main looked at nature through the spectacles of books."[22]

Poets in general, as men in general, of all the senses make most use of that of sight. Therefore, when a poet draws much upon his other senses, we may be misled into thinking that the images of sound, odor, and touch predominate. Even in his earliest poetry Milton used images of sound and odor. He continued to do so after he became blind. Hazlitt says,

There is also the same depth of impression in his descriptions of the objects of all the different senses, whether colours, or sounds, or smells—the same absorption of his mind in whatever engaged his attention at the time. It has been indeed objected to Milton, by a common perversity of criticism, that his ideas were musical rather than picturesque, as if because they were in the highest degree musical, they must be (to keep the sage critical balance even, and to allow no one man to possess two qualities at the same time) proportionably deficient in other respects.[23]

The general belief is that after the loss of one of the senses the others become more acute. Sir Arthur Pearson, who learned from personal experience, says, "There is not the least doubt that the loss of sight quickens and develops the other senses."[24] John Bernard Mannix, agreeing with this observation, explains, "The apparent improvement in the acuteness of the other senses so often remarked in blind people is usually the result of greater attention being concentrated on those senses."[25]

Especially is this compensation noted in the case of Helen Keller. Edward Newton says,

She enjoys music through vibrations. As she walks through a garden she can name the flowers on either side from their perfume. I walked with her through a conservatory. By chance she touched a flower. "Ah," she said, "the parrot plant." It was. I had never heard of it before.[26]

In the case of day laborers, a similar development of the sense of touch is evident after they become blind. Many are taught to read Braille. Such

[20] Walter Graham, "Sensuousness in Poetry of Milton and Keats," *South Atlantic Quarterly,* XVI (1917), 347.

[21] Thomas Keightley, *op. cit.,* p. 421. [22] V. P. Squires, *op. cit.,* p. 471.

[23] William Hazlitt, "On Shakespeare and Milton," *Lectures on the English Poets,* Philadelphia, p. 117.

[24] Arthur Pearson, *op. cit.,* p. 124. [25] John Mannix, *op. cit.,* p. 12.

[26] A. E. Newton, "Westward," *Atlantic Monthly,* CXLIX (May, 1932), 527.

acuteness could not be present in the sighted laborer whose work makes hard and horny hands. Judging from the experience of others, it is likely that the senses of odor, touch, and sound, which Milton manifested in his early poetry became even more acute in his blindness.

Reuben Post Halleck, on the contrary, declares that senses which have not been developed early in life, cannot be developed after the loss of sight. In the specific case of Milton, he asserts: "If his odor sense had not been cultivated while he was still young, we may be sure that his older and less plastic nerve cells would not have taken on the required modification after he was blind."[27] He also affirms that "If undeveloped spots are allowed to pass the plastic stage, they will remain permanently in that condition. . . . If young birds are brought up where they cannot hear the song of their own species, they will never at a later time be able to sing the pure song of their kind."[28] The song of the bird is not relevant. It is not bound up with its very existence. On the other hand, any blind man, even Milton, is forced to depend upon his other senses to report to him conditions which his eye no longer sees. It is difficult for the sighted to understand just how important to the blind are warnings received through the other senses. I do not agree with Halleck that senses undeveloped before the loss of sight cannot be developed afterwards. This subsequent development may fly in the face of all psychological theory, yet it seems to coincide with actual fact. For instance, in the case of the adult blind learning to read, the tactile sense has scarcely been developed previous to the loss of sight.

Gordon Lathrop, almost totally blind, says, "When I say to myself, I can see enough, I do not mean that the vague shadows are enough. Neither do I see clairvoyantly, nor in any esoteric manner. Chiefly I see with my ears."[29] Spaeth, who made a comparative study of Milton images, counted more auditory than visual ones in poetry written after Milton's loss of sight and concluded, "In his later poetical works, Milton shows a decided preference for the description of audible impressions."[30]

A different view of Milton images is held by F. Le Gros Clark, who says:

It is my impression that he was at his best when employing language less expressive of things seen than of things felt or of energy put out in some effort. He feels the actions of his Satan rather than visualizes them.[31]

In support of this view, he quotes passages, which he maintains are "vibrant with muscular energy. They are the language of the limbs and not of the eyes."[32] Masson's opinion is much the same. He says:

There were moments, I believe, in Milton's musings by himself, when it was a fell pleasure to him to imagine some exertion of his strength, like

[27] Reuben Halleck, *op. cit.*, p. 114. [28] Reuben Halleck, *op. cit.*, p. 110.
[29] Gordon Lathrop, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
[30] Sigmund Spaeth, *Milton's Knowledge of Music,* Princeton, 1913, p. 26.
[31] F. Le Gros Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 112. [32] *Ibid.*

that legendary one of Samson's, by which, clutching the two central pillars of the Philistine temple, he might tug and strain till he brought down the whole fabric in crash upon the heads of the heathenish congregation. . . .[33]

This is a rather sane interpretation. Milton, who had led an active life, subconsciously turned to description which could give vent to some of his balked energy.

No discussion of the effects of blindness upon Milton would be complete without reference to his sensitiveness, which is evinced in some of his prose but not in his poetry. Since sensitiveness is believed to be a characteristic of blindness, it is natural to assume that Milton's loss of sight would be the determining factor with reference to this quality. Yet I do not believe this is true. Blindness may have augmented this tendency, though I can find no proof that it did. It is my opinion that this sensitiveness in Milton appeared before the loss of sight. It is evinced by his defense of his reputation, his appearance, his habits, and his writings. If you feel that Milton exhibited such sensitiveness, you will, I believe, agree that it is quite evident in the *Second Defence* and in the *Defence of Himself*. Let us consider whether, on the other hand, it appears in *An Apology for Smectymnuus*.

Bishop Hall, or his son, had said, in an attack upon Milton,

. . . it is like he "spent his youth in loitering, bezzling, and harloting. . . ." Where his morning haunts are I wist not; but he that would find him after dinner must search the playhouses or the bordelli, for there I have traced him.[34]

The very nature of opprobrium admits of untruth and slanderous accusations. Yet it is surprising how seriously Milton regarded the statements made against him. To quote some of his lengthy defense from *An Apology for Smectymnuus:*

Nevertheless, since I dare not wish to pass this life unpersecuted of slanderous tongues, for God hath told us that to be generally praised is woeful, I shall rely on his promise to free the innocent from causeless aspersions: whereof nothing sooner can assure me, than if I shall feel him now assisting me in the just vindication of myself, which yet I could defer, it being more meet, that to those other matters of public debatement in this book I should give attendance first, but that I fear it would but harm the truth for me to reason in her behalf, so long as I should suffer my honest estimation to lie unpurged from these insolent suspicions. And if I shall be large, or unwonted in justifying myself to those who know me not, for else it would be needless, let them consider that a short slander will ofttimes reach further than a long apology; and that he who will do justly to all men, must begin from knowing how, if it so happen, to be not unjust to himself. . . . But he follows me to the city, still usurping and forging beyond his book notice, which only he affirms to have had; "and where my morning haunts are, he wisses not." It is wonder that, being so rare an alchymist of slander,

[33] David Masson, *op. cit.*, VI, 677. [34] *Ibid.*, II, 390.

he could not extract that, as well as the university vomit, and the suburb sink which his art could distil so cunningly; but because his limbec fails him to give him and envy the more vexation, I will tell him. Those morning haunts are where they should be, at home; not sleeping, or concocting the surfeits of an irregular feast, but up and stirring, in winter often ere the sound of any bell awake men to labor, or to devotion; in summer as oft with the bird that first rouses, or not much tardier, to read good authors, or cause them to be read, till the attention be weary, or memory have his full fraught: then, with useful and generous labors preserving the body's health and hardiness to render lightsome, clear, and not lumpish obedience to the mind, to the cause of religion, and our country's liberty, when it shall require firm hearts in sound bodies to stand and cover their stations, rather than to see the ruin of our protestation, and the inforcement of a slavish life. These are the morning practices: proceed now to the afternoon; "in playhouses," he says, "and the bordelloes." Your intelligence, unfaithful spy of Canaan? He gives in his evidence, that "there he hath traced me." Take him at his word, readers; but let him bring good sureties ere ye dismiss him, that while he pretended to dog others, he did not turn in for his own pleasure: for so much in effect he concludes against himself, not contented to be caught in every other gin, but he must be such a novice as to be still hampered in his own hemp.[35]

This passage, some of which has been omitted, is, I believe, as forceful, as serious, as long drawn out, and as fraught with wounded pride as any defense which Milton made of himself and his conduct in the writings after his loss of sight. In *An Apology for Smectymnuus* and in the *Second Defence* Milton chafes under the lash of adverse criticism. It is this chafing, this feeling of persecution, which is responsible, I believe, for our idea that Milton was extremely sensitive. Since this extreme sensitivity is evident in *An Apology for Smectymnuus,* it cannot be said that blindness gave rise to it, though, as I have previously stated, blindness may have augmented it.

After all, it is not easy to determine the effects of blindness upon Milton's life and writings. The tendency has been to attribute to his loss of sight many conditions which may be due to other causes or which do not actually exist. This tendency is due perhaps to the fact that the scholars who hold these views are not sufficiently acquainted with the true nature of blindness.

I conclude, therefore, that Milton's blindness affected his life and poetry spiritually and philosophically. It increased his power of concentration and the acuteness of his auditory and olfactory senses; but it was not responsible for the selection of visual images in his later poetry, and did not determine his painting on a vast scale, his choice of luminous and color adjectives, nor his forgetting of certain flowers. Finally, the sensitiveness evident in some of Milton's prose was not brought into being by his blindness.

[35] John Milton, "An Apology for Smectymnuus," *Student's Milton,* pp. 546-47.

CHAPTER XVIII

PRAISE AND DISPRAISE

Oh, Milton, singing thy great hymn
And quiring with the cherubim,
Thou art not blind, or sad, or old,
Thou hast no part in dark grave-mould,
Forever fair and blithe and young
And deathless as thy golden tongue!
The nightingale upon thy bough
Sang never half so sweet as thou
And could'st thou only sing to me
I would be blind that thou might'st see![1]

Perhaps no poet of the English language has received less dispraise than Milton. What censure there has been came mostly from his contemporaries and connects itself with his controversies. The subject is of too little importance to receive more than a brief notice. Chief of Milton's adversaries just previous to his loss of sight was Salmasius. Both the *Defence of Charles* and Milton's reply were written before his loss of vision. Salmasius left unfinished at his death *Claudii Salmasii ad Johannem Miltonum responsio* which was published by his friends, but not until December, 1660. After the publication of Milton's *Defensio pro populo Anglicano,* Pierre du Moulin and Alexander More took up the attack previously referred to. All the books of these three adversaries except *Defensio regia pro Carolo Primo ad Carolum Secundum,* by Salmasius, taunted Milton with his blindness.

Others who attacked Milton in blindness were Roger L'Estrange and Baillie. Under the text, "If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch," L'Estrange, the Royalist pamphleteer, wrote in 1660 an article entitled, "No Blinde Guides." The following passage from this diatribe refers definitely to Milton's blindness:

Doe you then, really expect to *see* Christ, Reigning upon Earth, even with those *very eyes you lost* ('tis reported) with staring too long and too sawcily upon the Portraiture of his Viceregent, to breake the Image, as your Impudence Phrases it? (It is generally indeed believed, you never wept them out for this Losse.)[2]

Milton, in attacking Griffith's sermon, "The Fear of God and the King," had provoked L'Estrange's ire. It may be noted in passing that with the Restoration L'Estrange became censor of the press. Of Baillie, Masson says:

[1] Harriet Spofford, "Blind Milton," in her *Ballads about Authors,* Boston, 1887.
[2] Roger L'Estrange, *No Blind Guides,* London, 1660, p. 13.

But the stout and worldly Baillie, Milton's Scotch "What d' ye call" of 1646, was not so forgiving. Coaxing himself in his new principalship of Glasgow University, to think as well of the Restoration as he could, he saw "the justice of God" in the "shameful deaths of ten of the regicides" . . . and God's justice also in the disgrace of "the two Goodwin, blind Milton . . . and others of the maleficent crew."[3]

In March, 1660, in answer to Milton's *Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth,* appeared a small sixteen page quarto, *The Censure of the Rota upon Mr. Milton's Book.* This was supposed to recount a debate of the members of the Rota club. However, according to Masson,

although it has been mistaken by careless people as a publication of Harrington's it is in reality a clever burlesque by some Royalist, in which . . . Milton and the Rota men are turned into ridicule.[4]

From this pamphlet I quote the speech which referred to Milton's blindness:

He wondred you did not give over writing, since you have always done it to little or no purpose; for though you have scribled your eyes out, your works have never been printed but for the Company of Chandlers and Tobaccomen, who are your Stationers, and the onely men that vend your Labors.[5]

According to Masson, these lines were found written, apparently about the year 1674, on the flyleaf of a copy of *Eikonoklastes.* They might be regarded as the last word of his hostile contemporaries.

> That thou escaped'st that vengeance which o'ertook,
> Milton, thy regicides and thy own book
> Was clemency in Charles beyond compare;
> And yet thy doom doth prove more grievous far,
> Old, sickly, poor, stark blind, thou writ'st for bread;
> So for to live thoud'st call Salmasius from the dead[6]

Perhaps the most interesting, though not hostile, comment on the poet by a contemporary is found in a letter by Waller: "The blind schoolmaster, John Milton, hath published a tedious Poem on the Fall of Man. If its length be not considered its merit, it has no other."[7] Waller, whose idea of poetry was confined to the pentameter couplet, could find little merit in the varied blank verse of *Paradise Lost.*

There has been little unfavorable criticism with reference to Milton's blindness since his own day. The most striking condemnation is that of

[3] David Masson, *op. cit.,* VI, 214. [4] *Ibid.,* p. 660.

[5] [James Harrington], *The Censure of the Rota upon Mr. Milton's Book, Entituled The Ready and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth,* London, 1660, p. 4.

[6] David Masson, *op. cit.,* VI, 717.

[7] Edmund Waller, [Extract from letter], *Gentleman's Magazine,* Vol. LXXXI, Part II (July-December, 1811), p. 155.

Samuel Johnson, who, it should be remembered, was a Tory and a pensioner of the king. He says:

However inferior to the heroes who were born in better ages he might still be great among his contemporaries, with the hope of growing every day greater in the dwindle of posterity. He might still be the giant of pygmies, the one-eyed monarch of the blind.[8]

But if the disapprobation suffered by Milton during his lifetime injured his pride, the tributes paid him in succeeding generations have surely equalled, if not surpassed, the highest hopes of the poet who believed that he was inspired and who consciously strove for fame. It is my purpose here to mention only a few of the tributes dealing specifically with blindness.

Among the less familiar are the poems by Ernest Myers,[9] T. J. Ouseley,[10] John B. Tabb,[11] Thomas Walsh,[12] and Horace Spencer Fiske,[13] which are bound by the common theme of Milton's majestic utterance in his blindness.

Leigh Hunt, in an emotional strain typical of the nineteenth century, in the "Sonnet to the Donor of a Lock of Milton's Hair," says:

> Perhaps he pressed it once or underneath
> Ran his fine fingers, when he leant, blank-eyed,
> And saw in fancy, Adam and his bride.[14]

The first great tribute paid to Milton was the poem by Andrew Marvell, "On Paradise Lost," which was prefixed to the second edition of that epic. I quote only the lines dealing with his compensation for blindness:

> That Majesty which through thy Work doth Reign
> Draws the Devout, deterring the Profane, . . .
> Where couldst thou words of such a compass find?
> Whence furnish such a vast expence of mind?
> Just Heav'n, thee like *Tiresias* to requite
> Rewards with Prophesie thy loss of sight.[15]

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, ever moved by deep religious fervor, in glowing effusion describes the genius of Milton:

It is most awful to think of him issuing from the arena of the controversy, victorious and *blind,* putting away from his dark brow the bloody laurel,

[8] Samuel Johnson, *op. cit.,* p. 99.

[9] Ernest Myers, "Milton," *Chautauquan,* LX (1910), 429.

[10] T. J. Ouseley, "Milton," [a sonnet], *The New Monthly Magazine,* LXXVI (1846), 364.

[11] John B. Tabb, "Milton," in his *Poems,* Boston, 1900, p. 113.

[12] Thomas Walsh, "John Milton," [poem], *The Independent,* LXV (1908), 1451.

[13] Horace Fiske, "To Milton's Mulberry Tree," [a sonnet], *University of Chicago Magazine,* I (1909), 97.

[14] Leigh Hunt, "Sonnet to the Donor of a Lock of Milton's Hair," *Foliage,* London, 1818, p. 131.

[15] Andrew Marvell, *op. cit.,* p. 158, ll. 32-33, 42-45.

left alone after the heat of the day by those with whom he had combated, and originating in that enforced dark quietude his epic vision for the inward sight of the unborn; so to avenge himself on the world's neglect by exacting from it an eternal future of reminiscence. . . . He is . . . the thorough brave man . . . never reproaching God for his griefs by his despair, praying without ceasing in the serenity of his sightless eyes; and, because the whole visible universe was swept away from betwixt them and the Creator, contemplating more intently the invisible infinite, and shaping all his thoughts to it in grander proportion.[16]

Carrying out the view that blindness for Milton had its compensation, William Prescott says:

The blindness which excluded the things of the earth, opened to him more glorious and spiritualized conceptions of heaven and aided him in exhibiting the full influence of those sublime truths which the privilege of free inquiry in religious matters had poured upon the mind.[17]

That Milton gained in inner vision with loss of sight A. A. Lipscomb agrees:

> The gift of genius taught thee whence it came, . . .
> They guardian love implored, and watchful eye,
> Lest, failing of thy trust, God should recall
> His light, and leave thee twice in gloom . . .
> Affliction crowned thy gifts, Milton, thy loss
> Was the world's gain—thy sorrow was its joy.
> Another wreath was added to thy brow,
> Another luster to thy bright renown,
> While fresh thanksgivings rose from loving hearts,
> Gifted to see the purpose and the end,
> When God upon thine eyelids laid His hands.[18]

Doubtless the most famous tribute is the lines of Thomas Gray in his *Progress of Poesy,*— lines which are perhaps the best known of that poem:

> Nor second he, that rode sublime
> Upon the seraph-wings of ecstasy,
> The secrets of th' abyss to spy.
> He Pass'd the flaming bounds of Place and Time:
> The living throne, the sapphire-blaze,
> Where angels tremble while they gaze,
> He saw; but, blasted with excess of light,
> Closed his eyes in endless night.[19]

Longfellow, Bulwer-Lytton, and Wordsworth picture Milton isolated by blindness, depicting scenes of grandeur beyond mortal sight. Long-

[16] Elizabeth Browning, *Essays on the Christian Poets,* New York, 1863, p. 194.
[17] William H. Prescott, *Biographical and Critical Miscellanies,* Philadelphia, 1882, p. 247.
[18] A. A. Lipscomb, "Milton," [an ode], *Harper's Magazine,* XX (1860), 771.
[19] Thomas Gray, "The Progress of Poesy," in his *Poetry and Prose,* Oxford, 1922, Part III, p. 55.

fellow addresses him as "Sightless bard, England's Maeonides."[20] Bulwer-Lytton describes him as seated

> Like some wrought monumental stone,
> Raising his sightless balls to the blue sky, . . .
> And all august repose . . .
> . . . like a Giant's sleep,
> Made calm the lifted grandeur of his brow.[21]

Wordsworth, emphasizing the idea of the austerity and aloofness characterizing Milton in his blindness, refers to him:

> Yea, our blind Poet, who in his later day
> Stood almost single, uttering odious truth,
> Darkness before and danger's voice behind,
> Soul awful—if the earth has ever lodged
> An awful soul.[22]

Van Dyke, whose deep religious fervor lends to his tribute an added sincerity, says in a poem to Milton:

> Where hast thou learned this deep, majestic strain,
> Surpassing all thy youthful lyric grace,
> To sing of paradise? Ah, not in vain
> The Griefs that won at Dante's side thy place,
> And made thee, Milton, by thy years of pain,
> The loftiest poet of the Saxon race.[23]

One of the loveliest tributes ever paid to Milton is that of George MacDonald, who in the poet's own words "justifies the ways of God to man": "God blinded him with his hand, that, like the nightingale, he might 'sing darkling.' "[24] Perhaps it was best for Milton to have felt that God works in a mysterious way. It lifted him above his calamity, and set him up as a supreme example to the world at large and particularly to the blind. As he so nobly answered the challenge, thus all the handicapped must answer, and find in affliction the blessing which alone makes its endurance possible; must, like Milton, learn to believe that "They also serve who only stand and wait."

[20] Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "Milton," in Edmund Stedman, *An American Anthology, 1787-1900,* Boston, 1900, p. 124, N.S.F.

[21] Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *The Siamese Twins . . . with Other Poems,* New York, 1831, p. 286.

[22] William Wordsworth, "John Milton," [Excerpt from *The Prelude*], in *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth . . .,* edited by Thomas Hutchinson, London, 1904.

[23] Henry Van Dyke, "Milton" [a poem], *Scribner's Magazine,* XLV (January-June, 1908), 160.

[24] George MacDonald, *England's Antiphon,* New York, 1900, p. 195.

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Since there are only four references on blindness listed by Stevens and Fletcher, I have attempted to build a bibliography based on the special passages referring to that subject. To my knowledge no previous attempt has been made to collect such fugitive material. In order to do this I have found it necessary to consult, not only the files of general libraries, but those of medical libraries, the American Foundation for the Blind, and the leading schools for the blind. Obviously, in many cases, the references to Milton's blindness are very brief, but they will be valuable, I hope, to those students interested in the subject.

ABBREVIATIONS

N.S.F. indicates that the reference is not included in David Harrison Stevens' *Reference Guide to Milton, from 1800 to the Present Day,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1930, *or* Harris Francis Fletcher's *Contributions to a Milton Bibliography, 1800-1930,* Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1931.

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